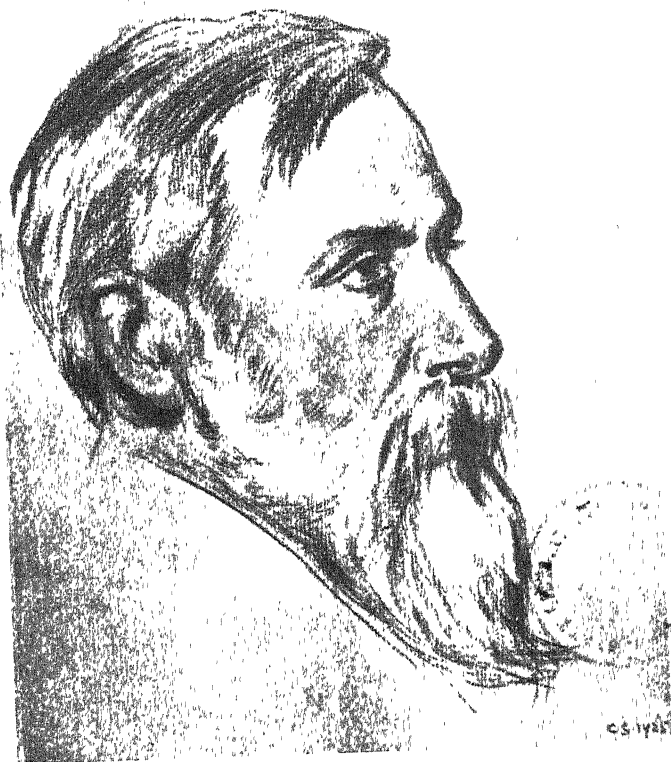


COLLECTED POEMS



After a drawing by Charles Shannon R. I

THE POEMS OF T. STURGE MOORE

COLLECTED EDITION
FIRST VOLUME

MACMILLAN AND CO. LIMITED
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DEDICATION

'To my wife'

Though brevity be soul to wit

Nor wit nor soul will blink from it!

You insist the three words are enough, but I doubt,

Then develope, refashion and cross it all out . . .

Anxieties at strife

With speech requicken life,—

Burning, remote, impalpable things

Evòke beyond those words

Breast jewels—humming birds

ERRATA

Page 41, lines 10 and 11 from the bottom should come three lines lower so as to count as 7 and 8 from the bottom.

„ 51, *in the sixth line from the bottom 'the' should be than.*

„ 64, *tenth line from top, insert her before 'cloak'.*

„ 132, *in the eighth line from the bottom 'past' should be part.*

„ 137, *last line but one of the dedication, delete 'TO'.*

„ 197, *six lines from the bottom, 'Of' should be Of.*

„ 198, *twelve lines from the top, 'suggestions' should be suggestion.*

„ 223, *seven lines from bottom, remove final quotation-mark to the end of the poem.*

„ 290, *nine lines from bottom, EIGHT should be EIGHTH.*

DEDICATION

'To my wife'

Though brevity be soul to wit

Nor wit nor soul will blink from it!

You insist the three words are enough, but I doubt,

Then develope, refashion and cross it all out . . .

Anxieties at strife

With speech requicken life,—

Burning, remote, impalpable things

Evòke beyond those words

Breast jewels—humming birds

Enhaloed with invisible wings;

While as from snoring top there come

Deep notes intent to drum

The despiser's defeat, the disparager's doom . . .

And behold! forth they flutter, like doves from a wood

The ardent endeavours assured there is room

For homes of delight more entrancingly good

Than cautious discounters dare plan for or could

Build if they should . . . thus encouraged my soul

Bids the partial perceptions bide the time of the whole.

NOTE

The items of this collection are not arranged chronologically because such an order is merely intellectual. The attempt to sort them by theme proved also frequently more reasoned than pleasing. There remained the much more arduous effort in which I have no doubt failed. Ideally each poem should appear among neighbours which enhance its effect. This is what those with the gift succeed in doing for flowers.

LIST OF BOOKS FROM WHICH THE COL-
LECTION HAS BEEN MADE

1899 THE VINEDRESSER AND OTHER
POEMS

1901 APHRODITE AGAINST ARTEMIS

1903 ABSALOM

1906 POEMS

1911 MARIAMNE

1911 A SICILIAN IDYLL

1914 THE SEA IS KIND

1917 THE LITTLE SCHOOL (ENLARGED)

1920 DANAË

1920 TRAGIC MOTHERS

1920 THE POWERS OF THE AIR

1923 JUDAS

1925 RODERIGO OF BIVAR

VARIOUS MAGAZINES AND JOURNALS
BESIDES A FEW UNPUBLISHED POEMS

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TO IDLENESS

ENOUGH, thou witch, too fond of me,
Begone, I know and hate thee!
Nothing canst thou of pleasure see
In one that so doth rate thee;

For empty are both mind and heart
While thou with me dost linger;
More profit would to thee impart
A babe that sucks its finger.

I know thou hast a better way
To spend these hours thou squanderest;
Some lad toils in the trough to-day
Who groans because thou wanderest;

A bleating sheep he dowses now
Or wrestles with ram's terror;
Ah, 'mid the washing's hubbub, how
His sighs reproach thine error!

He knows and loves thee, Idleness;
For when his sheep are browsing,
His open eyes enchant and bless
A mind divinely drowsing;

No slave to sleep, he wills and sees
From hill-lawns the brown tillage;
Green winding lanes and clumps of trees,
Far town or nearer village,

The sea itself; the fishing fleet
Where more as fond, thy lovers,
Heark'ning to sea-mews find thee sweet
Like him who hears the plovers.

Begone; those haul their ropes at sea,
These plunge sheep in yon river:
Free, free from toil thy friends, and me
From Idleness deliver!

KINDNESS

OF the beauty of kindness I speak,
Of a smile, of a charm
On the face it is pleasure to meet,
That gives no alarm!

Of the soul that absorbeth itself
In discovering good,
Of that power which outlasts health,
As the spell of a wood

Outlasts the sad fall of the leaves,
And in winter is fine,
And from snow and from frost receives
A garment divine.

Oh! well may the lark sing of this,
As through rents of huge cloud,
He broacheth blue gulfs that are bliss,
For they make his heart proud

With the power of wings deployed
In delightfulest air.
Yea, thus among things enjoyed
Is kindness rare.

For even the weak with surprise
Spread wings, utter song,
They can launch—in this blue they can rise,
In this kindness are strong,—

They can launch like a ship into calm,
Which was penned up by storm,
Which sails for the islands of balm
Luxuriant and warm.

RENASCENCE

O HAPPY soul, forget thy self!
This that has haunted all the past,
That conjured disappointments fast,
That never could let well alone;
That, climbing to achievement's throne,
Slipped on the last step; this that wove
Dissatisfaction's clinging net,
And ran through life like squandered pelf:—
This that till now has been thyself
Forget, O happy soul, forget.

If ever thou didst aught commence,—
Set'st forth in spring-tide woods to rove,—
Or, when the sun in July throve,
Didst plunge into calm bay of ocean
With fine felicity in motion,—
Or, having climbed some high hill's brow,
Thy toil behind thee like the night,
Stoodst in the chill dawn's air intense;—
Commence thus now, thus recommence:
Take to the future as to light.

Not as a bather on the shore
Strips of his clothes, glad soul, strip thou:
He throws them off, but folds them now;
Although he for the billows yearns,
To weight them down with stones he turns;
To mark the spot he scans the shore;
Of his return he thinks before.
Do thou forget
All that, until this joy franchised thee,
Tainted thee, stained thee, or disguised thee;
For gladness, henceforth without let,
Be thou a body, naked, fair;

And be thy kingdom all the air
Which the noon fills with light;
And be thine actions every one,
Like to a dawn or set of sun,
Robed in an ample glory's peace;
Since thou hast tasted this great glee
Whose virtue prophesies in thee
That wrong is wholly doomed, is doomed
and bound to cease.

SILENCE SINGS

SO faint, no ear is sure it hears,
So faint and far;
So vast that very near appears
My voice, both here and in each star
Unmeasured leagues do bridge between;
Like that which on a face is seen
Where secrets are;

Sweeping, like veils of lofty balm,
Tresses unwound
O'er desert sand, o'er ocean calm,
I am wherever is not sound;
And, goddess of the truthful face,
My beauty doth instil its grace
That joy abound.

THE AWAITED VOICE

LOOK, she is twenty-one,
And straight as the mast of a yacht!
Near her a smaller round
Is transformed as the world by the sun.
Those places where she is not
Look doleful as they look fond;
They pine as a tree that grieves
For a million of radiant leaves.

Hush, she surely is wise,
And perchance may deign to speak
Or tell some wonderful tale:
Whose thrill through her voice shall rise
As blushes mount in her cheek,
And shall over our minds prevail
Like a bevy of swallows come north,
Or as flowers re-hallow the earth.

Bow, for she turns this way!
As poplars stoop in the wind
And tremble before the moon,
Dark-stoled though staidly gay,—
So let us wait her mind,
So let us crave the boon
For which Diana ached
Before Endymion waked.

SHE

AS from heaven alighting, she early
Stepped sleep-anointed from bed;
Yet, if her brow stooped, you dreamed she
Gazed through the ground at the dead.

Aflash as are dewy pansies
Were the eyes that she raised to meet men's
Till their blackness bloomed benignly
With smiles of a gay innocence.

When, slim and straight as a fir-tree,
She carried that teeming head,
On the dignity of her bearing
Da Vinci's eyes might have fed.

She had soothed while her years were tender
The woe that can not be shared,
And knew that the wrong had happened
Which never can be repaired,

And, though sigh escaped if she brooded,
Her alacrity captured the light
That streams from ineffable sources
And tempers with stars midnight.

She planned and she wrought and though she
Had given her utmost, behold!
A brimmed heart every morning
To lavish on young and old,

'Till cavelike it flooded with slumber
As the pillow beneath her head gave.
Thus her days by their reflux bounty
Became as the heave of a wave—

A wave that washes for ever
A world that will never be clean :
And, that fragrance from ardency fade not,
Where the throng was, she passed unseen.

TO NOVICE LOVE

O GAY, adventurous, unsealed eyes,
Feast upon grandeur that was there—
Though not revealed to you—O wise
That late were foolish, now aware

Of what *they* saw—banded with those
Whose joy completes the worth they praise,
Whose day ebbs not beneath the sun
A common one of many days!

Return not! On! Why glance back even?
Beheavened there, a world is yours
So, so unlike this rifled Eden
Where carnage ever breeds or roars!

ON HARTING DOWN
TO JULIEN P. MONOD

ONCE, when their hearts were wild with joy,
They bedded on the downs:
Hours drifted past, the dawn grew ghast,
Their polls wore dewy crowns.

While the stars paled, she, first, awoke
And saw, no more alone,
They kernel were to a herd of deer,
Come round them all unknown.

A dun buck couched upon the left,
A white doe to their right,
An hundred others, like watching mothers,
Loomed peacefully out of night.

Ere she could wake him, they rose and wereshaking
Small droplets from cold thighs;
Proudly the leader then streamed them afar
To where the sun would rise.

Till, dot by dot, they threaded the arch
His lifting forehead raised,
And, sublimed to light, were lost to sight,
Though still enthralled she gazed.

Her lover rose and, leaning close,
Through to her mind he peered;
Parked therein, numerous, timid, dumb
Musings retired or neared.

LIGHT HEART

EARS lack no food, for loaded Time
Spins taking tales from waifs of crime,
And hapless love wins luck for rhyme,—
Yet favour and bounty they blossom like flowers,
And begetting brings weeping on laughter like showers.
With both hands give then,
Let Light Heart live then,
For time-to-come's a sieve, when
Nothing shall through the web pass
Save freshness that groweth, is mown, and regroweth
like grass.

As bees with honey cram the hive
Sweet, loving lads do well to wive;
Where husband's kiss the toddlers thrive;
For favour and bounty they blossom like flowers,
And begetting brings weeping on laughter like showers.
With both hands give then,
Let Light Heart live then,
For time-to-come's a sieve, when
Nothing shall through the web pass
Save freshness that groweth, is mown, and regroweth
like grass.

No wall nor rafter cramps the sky;
Though airmen like the swallows fly,
The room for thought yet keeps man shy;
While favour and bounty they blossom like flowers,
And begetting brings weeping on laughter like showers.
With both hands give then,
Let Light Heart live then,
Since time-to-come's a sieve, when
Nothing shall through the web pass
Save freshness that groweth, is mown, and regroweth
like grass.

NEW BORN

ALL need and no power!
A bud furled in sleep,
That winks the hid flower
At the world to peep.

“Nearest kin to my food,
Of one blood with my bed,
All that is seems so good
As could never be said.

“I am I, what thou art—
O mother, my world—
Conceives not the heart,
Round which I am curled.

“Yet soft is this cheek,
Rich too this breast,
To find them so meek
Sets all question at rest.”

No need is all power,
O bud furled in sleep,
Then wink that rapt flower
And from thy bliss peep!

JOY

LIKE hoar-frost on a tree at dawn
Sparkles all wise delight;
And, as each branch to taper twigs
Soaring refines, joy's might
Whitens, as slenderer forms it clings to,
And towers as more fresh the growth it giveth wings to.

Frail like the topmost twigs above
The tallest forest tree,
An infant's archness is by love
Held aloft, and we
Find nothing life can shew entrances
Our hearts as doth the flash of those bright glances.

TEMPIO DI VENERE

A MARBLE ruin nigh forgotten
Fronts sheer on Naples' bay;
The cornice stones are weather-rotten,
Stained both by rain and spray.

The shifting mounding shore has buried,
All steps save the top three,
To which small waves run up like hurried
Sly kisses of the sea.

The fluted columns crevice-jointed
Must totter every storm.
Bird-droppings have the eaves anointed,
Blunted each moulding's form.

With pavement chequer-rich sand-whitened,
Tell-tale to flaws of wind—
With walls, that once gay pictures brightened,
Blank as an old man's mind—

For fisher's painted boat 'tis stable,
Festooned with nets and cords,
Littered with dead-eyes, ends of cable,
Crab-baskets, boat-hooks, boards.

A wreckage mast, its only rafter,
Supports an old tanned sail.
Here Venus dwelt who so loved laughter;
Here now chinks flute and wail;

Here once the pirate-Pompey's seamen
Offered her shells and gold;
Here oft, flogged slave or pious leman
Complained that hearts are sold.

No more here marble limbs shall glisten,
Nor carved face smile here more,
And, bending forward half to listen,
Prompt those who mute adore.

Yet, though he call no goddess mother,
A child bathed here to-day
Who, naked, was as Cupid's brother,
So sturdy, arch, and gay!

TO SLOW MUSIC

LIKE shovels white of porcelain
In pyramids of spices deep,
Are shells half scooped into brown sand
Which ebbing waves drew on a heap.
Like blush by smooth nail overlain
Are others; five for either hand,
Nay, plenty for both hands and feet
Of Venus when she walks the strand,
Escaped from perfumed temple's heat.

Like wail which for Adonis rang,
Drawn up and round a hollow maze,
In others dwells a wealth of sound
That she prefers to all men's praise.
Made coral by a moment's pang
And snapt off from true hearts are found
The branching red rich veins of those
Who, wounded by her son, have drowned,
Seeking a sea-change for their woes.

The idle nymphs in caves far down,
Secluded life-long from alarms,
Where distance lulls the billow's roar
And moony sea-light dreams of day,
Made every shell that strews the shore.
They with their handiwork do crown
Long tresses—twine their grand white arms
With chains of cowries, and array
Their necks and bosoms Naught of lily
(Since Venus never tells) know they,
Naught of the tender violet's charms,
Of daisy naught, nor daffodilly.

TO LOKI

CEASE, thou art terrible! Cease, thou tireless god;
No purpose doth thy crude, brief laugh declare;
Thy beauty charms the less for being odd;
Thy skin is bronzed, like red flame flaps thy hair:
Shalt thou attract the would-be-self-possessed?
Oh, thou art young forever, there it lies;
Bewilder me forever with thy mocking eyes!

Thrall me! what though thy laugh ring hollow? Stay
Those limbs from dancing! Hover lower,
From off those sulphurous rocks thy feet leave grey
In spots like aged lichen patches! Slower;
Mine eyes ache following thy yellow vest
Which crisps and curdles round hips, neck and shoulder
While, lightning-like, it streams from boulder top to boulder!

—Leaps as, from desert snow
That ice-plough cleaves beneath the spangled night,
When clearest wind doth blow,
Flash and fly up those brandished spears of light,—
They hopping twang or crack with zest,
While the white bear facing north,
The silken blue-fox stealing forth,
Blinking seal in furry vest,
And the thick muffled Laplander,
Gaze and wonder at the stir!
Is it happy warriors dancing,
Fire-light on their gay spears glancing?
Is it gods, or demon sprites,
Or shooting thoughts of summer nights,
Like pangs that torpid flesh contains,
Thrilling Winter's ice-locked brains?
No, for it is thee and thine,
Who plans of men and gods do plot to countermine.

Volcanic nature, passionless desire,
Divine mobility, intuitive
Touchstone of qualities,—enter, thou Fire,
Enter our life once more,—force us to live!
May I encounter thee in some long lane,
A gipsy with stained garments on thy back,
With toys and charms and songs bedizening thy pack!

Let weeds with wicked smells, as fumitory,
Make smart the shattered ruin of thy hat;
And, volubly persistent with thy story,
Trap me with hints, and like a wary cat
Let me believe escape were not in vain;
Then make me feel, how fond man's thought to rest
When none but active thought fulfils the soul's behest;

And of that ship tell me
Which storms, which fogs, which calms, which bergs
of ice,
No danger of the sea,
Can wholly wreck; that still its voyage plies,
Righted, after each mischance,
By an old but nimble crew,
Lovers of green, salt, and blue,
That have oft, with fiery glance,
Watched the ice-floe's closing jars,
And have steered by austral stars,
Known Newfoundland's milk-white gloom,
Mirage through hot hazes loom,
Noontide darked by clouds of birds
And large fishes utter words.
Garbs of many climes they wear,
Hoary unkempt beards and hair,
Wiry comrades proved of thine
Dauntless like thee, though old, they have like eyes
that shine.

Life is not vain, I know it; I am thine,
O Loki, thine to teach or to betray;
Thy treacheries are punishments condign:
Cheat me, and laugh; be cruel the god's way;
Get hungry lips with vivid truth-like lies,
Then grant them speech with lords and harlots grand;
Whose hearts shall faint and leap like birds held in the hand!

Than pity more sensitive to bridle thought!
No eyes, like thine, foresee the course of Change,
As, step by step, with Time, followed by nought,
She passes, and still is: endlessly strange,
Enamouring speech until it with thee vies,
Thou patronizest thieves who keep their bad lives jolly
And wags who pilfer seers, in wisdom to deck folly.

Content thou dost abhor:
The gods were happy once, and joyed their fill;
Those days on thee lay sore;
Thou lovely Balder by their hands didst kill.
Beauty to win back from Death,
Sadly turned they then to toil,
Labourers in obdurate soil;
But more freely came thy breath,
And more nimbly worked thy wit;
Oftener then, thy travel kit
Donned, thou wentest singing forth,
East, or west, or south, or north;
Every homestead knew thee then,
Humoured, railed upon, by men,
Mischievous Lob, or lanthorn Jack,
Fiend upon the grumbler's back,
Thou wast ours; but we are thine
By halves at most, ha ha! Thou art but half divine!

TO RABINDRANATH TAGORE

I CANNOT mock thy "Yes" with "No";

For what is hidden may be of such worth

As beggars all we know:

Yet how mine wonders at thy mind!—

To see schooled man so easy on this earth

And yet not blind!

Is it true thy candour weighs

Long June Days,

Deep clear nights,

Full tenderness on self-forgetful face,

All-probing knowledge, art perfection-nigh,

And aught else that delights

Poor man's goodwill,

As being really like a trace

Left on fingers that have touched,—

Perhaps half-tried to kill,—

Some lustrous butterfly?

Is Psyche so much grander than our sages vouched

That all our noblest win of her is like

A few scales brushed from a cerulean wing?

Ah, is all evil impotent to strike

Her blow more damaging

Than clumsy child adorer gives the fly

That he admires too much

To really clutch,

Although he fain must try?

And, if he woo,

Will she even dare much too,

Hover down to his lips and, like his rapture returned,

Enter and home in the brain and the heart that for her
yearned?

TO GIACOMO LEOPARDI

COLD was thy thought, O stricken son
Of Italy, cold as the moon
That naked, barren, frozen, on
This fertile earth, the boon
Of silver light
Sheds by night,—
Touching the million shaken leaves
That crown our woods; while every fold
Of buttressed Alp soft charm receives,
Till near things look like lands far sought.
Yes, thy thought ached, it was so cold;
And winsome movement, and choice sound,
In harmonies divinely wrought,
Could they be born of that profound
Despair which they so clearly taught?
Nay, suffering, like a nightmare still,
Turned all thy youth's warm radiance chill,
—As yon dead moon turns the sun's beams
Aside in cold yet lucid streams,
Whose loveliness from farther came
Than that dead planet's cratered side;
A globe of glory all one flame
Is in their brightness still implied.
So in the beauty of thine odes
Man's glowing eager spirit shines,
While yet its strange deflection loads
With added charm their play, refines
Their luminous force, till they,
Fair as moonlight,
Infuse the night
Of our roused sorrow, sadness, and
Remembered pain, where they expand
Brilliance, both solemn and serene,
Grand as the presence of Night's queen.

SEPTEMBER TWILIGHT

A LARGE pool, and tall trees, and lo! undressed
One runs out, pauses, hesitates, looks round:
Twilight reviveth freedom long oppressed;
The bather plunges in; a generous sound
And radiant splash of waters welcome him;
His wake all silver widens, he can swim!

—Swim in that dark cold water—swim and wend
As through a dream with strange facility,
A dream still quite unconscious it must end,
Quite dreadless—though this pool proved open sea,
No memory goes with it, no hope leads,
But inwardly content it onward speeds.

THE VIGIL

HOW long, dear Sleeper, must I wait,
Watching this calm deny thy death,
Ere thou returnest still elate,
Like victor, crowned with parsley wreath,
From some Elysian haven green?—
Ere 'neath slow-lifting lids are seen
Thy dreamful eyes, which yet behold
Those friends of an heroic mould,
Who pledge thee there, in Hippocrene?

'Pledge thee'? . . and prize! Then nevermore
Will they release thee from their home!
And thou, on that rare-fruited shore,
Must needs forget earth's honeycomb,
And the joys checkered with distress,
Of friends who did not love thee less,
Yet lack the port of those who dance
On wave-smoothed sands, as in a trance
Buoyant with everlastingness!

Ah, no! this is my dream, not thine;
Void of the soul that shaped it well,
Thy beauty lies, a fragile shell!
It is the past that was divine,
And nursed thy form and spirit fine!
All perishes! those days are fled,
And Memory's art cannot restore
Her fading pictures of the dead,
That come, come faintlier, come no more!

EDITH COOPER—DIED DECEMBER 13.
MCMXIII

RUMOUR of fame
Fanned her at noon of youth:
Instead, there came
Sorrow, suffering, and uncouth
Silence from those who praised aright
When, mocked by a name,
They thought her work showed a man's might.
Yet courage braver grew,
Creating new and more though strength seemed less,
She, to her beauty true,
Here put on everlastingness.
And now, discerned, loved, admired, revered,
Though by too few,
Wherever else her spirit renew
Its radiant life endearing, lives on for us endeared.

SELWYN IMAGE—DIED AUGUST 20.
MCMXXX

HE lived a harmony that tuned us all,
However diverse, to a courteous mood;
Mere feeders dined with him and savoured food,
Mere readers heard some period's cadence fall
And bustlers relished peace. That smile recall,
Which greeted youth and bloom!...from him the good
Like flowers took sun!...yea, dull wits understood
More than they dared to hope! He, in some scrawl
A student blushed for, found the telling mass
And large contour which rescued a design;
With archly worded anecdotes benign
Charmed from contemners genial warmth.. Alas!
How much his further radiance here depends
On tongues and hearts that fail in us his friends!

BEAUTY

WITH naught the world contains or small or great
Can we content desire! "Here is no home!"
Cries Hope—"No realm" cries kingly Love—"No
dome!"

Sighs Faith "to tent my altars—alternate
My choruses beneath." They hardly wait,
Though hollow wayside trees hold honeycomb,
Though o'er the hedge-top honeysuckle roam,
But, pilgrims, they push on with "It grows late."
Knowledge they scorn for slowness, and decry
Beauty made happy with a flower's growth,
Beauty whose fault is being sweetly shy,
That, blue-eyed, wonders both at haste and sloth,
That, water-born, was brought up by the light . . .
And yet, O Beauty, touch us with thy might!

HOPE

HOPE is a dream dreamed by the mummied past,
Or sound inside an egg; loved hearts with ours
To wed—as some bee-go-between the flowers—
She woman-like e'er walketh over-fast,
Half-frightened by odd shadows that are cast
In front from just behind; hers are all powers
By which the unknown helps the known; she towers
Where through the rainbow we would stride at last.
The solemn snow and silver hair are hers,
For folded linen clothes and napkins wrapped
Together by themselves: each neat bud bears
Witness to her deft fingers, who ne'er tapped
At Memory's door and found her smileless—kissed
Blind Love and left unfound the path he missed.

BEFORE REREADING SHAKESPEARE'S
SONNETS

TO THE LATE THOMAS HARDY, O.M.

WHETHER his loves were many or but two,
Whether his heart grew strong or bled to waste,
Whether he toyed with words as idlers do
Or some unseasoned lines betray his haste,
We enter here as to an empty house, ..
As pale folk from a far-off clime and date
Peep into pictured halls, where the carouse
Of mummied kings once mocked their certain fate.
We gaze at signs he saw, but only guess
How he read what we read . . . not bloom to fruit,
Meal to moth's wing, sight to blind eye is less
Recoverable! Time treads life underfoot:
Black, dead, these words can warm us but as coal,
Once, forest leaves, they murmured round his soul.

THE DEED

O THOU who art the lesson that I learn,
Ah! how thou jadest my poor brain and heart!
Too subtle, too intense for me thou art,
Too pure, too simple; why canst thou not spurn
Mine effort—quench the flax that will not burn
But ever smokes? What hast thou to impart
To restive dulness that would backward start
And leave thee? Why must thou to follow turn?
Wilt dog me every time I break away?
More piteous still behind me hurrying seem
Thy feet, the more I feel thou squand'rest care.
Canst be the reason why I am, thou dream
Of what I might be? Strike me down, nor spare,
Nor pity rebel weary of his day!

II

No sight earth yields our eyes is lovelier than
 The body of a naked strong young man.
 O watch him course the meadows flecked with shade
 Beside a stream, before his plunge be made !
 Then watch him ridge the water to its brims
 With rhythmic measure while he gravely swims ;
 And watch him issue, shining even more,
 Run, leap and prove himself upon the shore,
 Intent to warm his limbs and have them dry,
 Making great efforts, seeming as he would fly.
 Ah ! he can fill an hour up in this way
 And never hear a voice within him say
 "Why art thou not at work?" for it is true
 That all he is approves what he doth do.

III

But might the beauty of the soul be viewed
 As easily coursing over happenings rude,—
 Parting the fulness of its quick desires
 With strokes as steady toward where man aspires
 To be, in order there to prove new strength ;—
 Might souls be watched thus, then indeed at length
 Life winged with beauty and unhindered grace
 Would quicken rapture on the upturned face.
 Might souls be viewed as swallows are, then all
 Would train as athletes, let loose follies fall,
 Strip each his cared-for self from clinging shames
 Like useless garments, and at heavenly games
 Exert his talents and good-will express,
 Not as lame duty tries, but with success.

IV

Mine is that body with which man might soar !
 Yet I refuse to yield it to his need ;
 On his fine motions every gaze would feed
 If by my free gift visible form he wore.
 Those only, who his durance aye deplore,
 In fleeting visions worship him, when, freed,
 He, gay for beauty, leaps, a bird indeed,
 From dreamland where outcast he pined before.
 Yea, those there are who for his exile feel ;
 Even such as are a comfort when this life
 Loses what youth bestows, and quails at strife.
 They pity, though they cannot make him real
 For others, by resigning all to him,—
 Wealth, time, desire, his ; his, brain, heart and limb !

V

Sweet bird of heaven, he rests as swallows do
 Who furl and hold their long wings level while
 They sit upon some ledge : so in mid-blue
 Lights he upon some sailing white cloud-isle.
 Deep orange plumage sheathes his naked back
 As he sits on his heels and clasps his knees
 Each in a hand, the forearm lying slack
 Along the thigh. There breathes he at his ease,
 Filling anew and refilling his chest,
 With stretched neck, leaning forward through the gale,
 His flushed face gleaming from its passage zest
 For dive sublime or yet more rapturous sail.
 Beauties as rare were seen, if those who try
 To express concern for man for him would die.

VI

Am I become one substance with the past?
 Results wrought in me, having bound my will,
 Stand at the portal armed, prepared to kill
 Each sweet thought it is vain to invite at last.
 With dear averted faces, they as fast
 As may be sweep by one who loves them still,
 Anxious, if seen, not seeing, to fulfil
 With just neglect the sentence on him passed.
 The *man I was* doomed him I am to sorrow.
 Yet *one who might be* whispers to my heart
 "To-day is great with Yesterday's child To-morrow,
 Who, young, is good; who, good, needs all thou art.
 It costs a life to do each lovely thing:
 End thine own days and give place to a King!"

VII*

He who acts is the only splendid man.
 Who works for him or holds a torch is brave:
 Nay, one who merely listens at the door
 But wills the deed, abashed receiveth praise.
 Naught save true valour, needed through long years,
 Can shake the world or free a soul from pain.
 Glorious the thing done! glorious the doer! glorious
 The day and hour which were used so well!
 All eyes eternally shall light at them,
 Speech burn with power when they are its theme,
 And minds conceive that else had borne no thought.
 Life, time and matter from the integral act
 Draw their sole worth: it lives, endures, hath weight.
 The rest, inert, is fugitive, unstable.

**In part suggested by a passage in the ELECTRA of
 Hugo von Hofmannsthal.*

TYRFING

TO HILDA THOMPSON (NOW MRS
ORME) WHO, AS HERVOR ON NOVEM-
BER 4, 1922 AT BEDALES, ANIMATED A
SERIES OF PICTURES THAT I WOULD
GIVE A GREAT DEAL TO SEE AGAIN.

CHARACTERS

ANGANTYR A VIKING SON OF ARNGRIM
TIND, RANI, HARVORD, HIS BROTHERS

TOFA WIFE TO ANGANTYR

HERVOR THEIR DAUGHTER

A FISHER LAD

A HERDSMAN

SCENE: THE ISLAND OF SAMSEY

Late on a summer afternoon, under an immense sky, a forest like a wall runs from the left and ends right of the centre while, beyond it and in front, sad flats of low dunes expand dominated here and there by tumuli; some are crowned with cairns of flints and have low timber lintels and doors; some are mere barrows of grass; a few have a weather-rotten oar or so planted on them. The view is northward; the sun will sink off left. The door end of one of these collective graves stands right front facing left.

Enter left front a Fisher lad leading TOFA, a small wizened woman with forehead scarred between the eyes.

FISHER LAD [stopping abruptly and turning round to face her]

Our journey's done.

TOFA Which of these barrows holds
The bones of Angantyr?

FISHER LAD Your promise first:
All known, you'd likely shuffle out of it.

TOFA

What, give before I know! Without my ring,
I'd have naught left to buy the knowledge with.

FISHER LAD

Your skin and bones have been wrung dry of trust.

TOFA

There's grease and sap in you for many a day;
So you should trust more easily than I.

FISHER LAD

Though I be young, my seamy cat-boat's old
And lets the sea in, as my hut lets rain:

The wood of both is tinder. With your ring
I'll have withal to make them last and serve.

And, if October shoals are good this year,
I mind to wive, so I'll be on my guard:

There's more ahead of me than you can look for.

d

TOFA

Ah, but I've suffered more, and so my need
Swollen with actual losses outweighs yours
Which is but dread to lose. I've been a queen,—
Pledged often in four hundred horns of mead!

FISHER LAD

You speak of loss, but mirth lurks in your eye.

TOFA

I speak of what my every atom feels.
This scar is old; though it look moist and raw,
'Twas dealt me by the man I'd hugged and kissed,—
Dealt with a sword not forged by mortal smith
But cursed so that the wound will never close—
And cursed with worse doom yet; my man did this,
And every hand that grips that hilt must do
Like deed of shame, and as he died here fighting
So all who wield it die defending Tyrfing—
Tyrfing, that was the name the fell blade bore
Which ruined my whole life—you've heard of Tyrfing.
'Tis woe, not age, has tanned and shrivelled me.

FISHER LAD

It will take more than words that may be lies
To change my mind.

TOFA You might take all I have,
I'm small and feeble, easily hurt or killed:
Your fear's absurd!

FISHER LAD That's true; show me the ring.
[She shows it, then swiftly hides it behind her.]
Old mother, your hand's yet quick as any stoat.

TOFA

That ring's good pay for ferrying to this isle
One light as dry bean-stalk.

FISHER LAD To make an end,
I'll hazard on my strength against your tricks.
This large mound with the door, then, is the grave
Of Angantyr; there the twelve brethren sleep.

And hereabouts they fought, if fame speak true.
[She gives the ring; when he has examined it he continues:]

The sun's low down, you'd best not loiter here
For a long sorrowing over your dead man.
I'll not push off at once, but wait an hour
And take you back.

TOFA Yes! no; I may be stayed!
Come back to-morrow; I've still a ring maybe
To pay more service.

FISHER LAD

More tricks! But look for shelter:
You'll find some herdsmen's huts lie north of west,
Where yon wood nears the sea.
Hereabouts is most awesome after dark;
Wraiths have been met, and queer unnatural flares:
I've watched them when out fishing, like a town
Twinkling where is no living body's house.

TOFA

Fear not for me: I've wit and runes to boot.

FISHER LAD

I'll hug the shore to-morrow before noon.

TOFA

It will be kind.

FISHER LAD

Don't let dark find you here.

[Exit right front]

[She seats herself on the ground with her back to the barrow and waits in silence for the lad to get well away; then, leaning back against the further of the two buttresses of turf which flank the door, speaks over her shoulder as to one within.]

Angantyr, I am Tofa.

[A silence]

Are you deaf, husband? is your sleep so sound?
'Twenty-one years back my whisper was enough

To bring your arms around me in the dark.
Has black hate quenched remembrance of our love,
So that no sparkle from it wakes your brain?

[A silence]

By your sword Tyrfing, by
That gust from hell which drove you mad and left
This scar across my brow,—

By that long hair you had been used to plait
For the mere bliss it gave your giant fingers,—
By my scalp that you in rage exposed to scorn
Like stubble-acres to the months of rain,—

I conjure you to answer me this once.

[A silence; then she rises, takes two steps right, then
turns to front the door]

What! do you stickle for more ceremony,
Keeping mum to me? I had thought the dead,
When they've been forced to hold their peace so long,
Would readily answer those who were their own,
Though they exact stranger rites from meddling witches.
[reflects; then]

Yet lengthy silence disinclines for speech;
Even *my* tongue after quite lonely days
Has stiffened numb as though in need of chafing;
So vacant years spent here might maim like frost-bite.
An old rune clamours out for speech, I'll try it:
What charms, they say, plain talk from tench or mould-
warp

Should part her husband's lips for wife once loved.

Voice for the dumb!

Words for the tongue-tied!

Odin, wise, one-eyed,

Pierce thou the glum

Stale cold pain

Of the skull-cramped brain!

[THE VOICE OF ANGANTYR out of the grave
Tofa, is that thy voice, and not

Those never-changing accents in my brain,
That will not let me taste this barrow's peace?]

TOFA

Yes, it is I who smile in spite of dread,
To learn you have not lain untroubled here
While I must bear the hard lot of a serf.

[ANGANTYR'S VOICE as before

How, of a serf?]

TOFA

All men said, Angantyr
Had never slashed his wife and cropped her head
Without clear proof that she deserved such shame.

[ANGANTYR'S VOICE as before

Forgive me, Tofa. Ah! that cursed blade;
Would I had never closed my hand on it!]

TOFA

Yes, even our child, to prove your fatherhood
Must sleep on snow, race, wrestle, fight with boys,
And never ease a hurt by audible wail,
And never cease to harden her young arms
Or toughen knees and ankles, till she, now,
Fares with her Viking-comrades out to sea.

[ANGANTYR'S VOICE as before

A maid! and comrade of the Vikings, Tofa?]

TOFA

Equal in strength, in courage and in pride
To have proved herself your daughter with your spirit.
What it oft cost her as a child, God knows;
She never told: but has won freedom now,
As though you never had defamed her mother.

[ANGANTYR'S VOICE

O wife, this is a marvel. What's her name?]

TOFA

Hervor, and for her sake am I come here
Where she will soon be, begging hard from you
That Tyrfing. I was put about to get
Beforehand hither, so headstrong is her youth.

[ANGANTYR'S VOICE

Never shall she have either sword or curse.]

TOFA

She swears that she will have it, curse or no.

Hark! that should be her yodle.

[Comes forward and gazes round] It is a herd,

Worries some goats together with his dog

Yonder upon the flat lip of the bay,

Whom she has seen.

[stooping behind the barrow]

He hears and hastes this way,

Trusting his flock to keep the track to stable.

Where shall I hide? Behind this barrow?

[ANGANTYR'S VOICE No

Behind the next.]

TOFA I fear all dead men's voices

Save yours alone; and, look, the sun sinks fast!

I dare not go so far off, Angantyr.

[She hides behind the barrow and soon the HERD enters, coming round the front of the barrow from the right, and meets HERVOR on the left as she enters well back.]

HERD Where do you spring from, woman?

HERVOR I came in my long ship to Munar bay.

HERD Back to it then! or seek some friendly roof.

HERVOR I know none of the island folk, and shall
Not need a bed to-night.

HERD Not a roof either?

HERVOR Nor yet a roof.

HERD This grave-yard foreland is
A fearsome place to be abroad by night in.

HERVOR

Good friend, which of these cairns did Arrow Odd
Raise o'er the sons of Arngrim?

HERD

Name not the dead! You must be half a fool

To venture on so plain a question here.

HERVOR

Fellow, for your good help here is a ring—

HERD [edging away distrustfully and speaking at her]

Not even a ring of gold keeps me from home,

Or tricks me into naming dead men, here,

While night steals in on day. Samsey's an isle

Where goats may safely bleat! Small talk of milk

And cheese in Samsey's safe but, out of doors,

In Samsey fighters and fighting

Never must be named!

HERVOR My talk's of little else.

HERD Say nothing then!

[then looking at her with a new suspicion]

Young woman, are you mortal? I doubt it, seeing

This mail of iron and that queer cap of bronze.

HERVOR I have slain men in battle, and expect
To die as they did.

HERD You're no Valkyr then?

Not daughter to Odin, eh?

HERVOR

I ride the iron-shod steed whose hooves dint earth,

And that sail-wingèd plunger on the brine;

But never bestrode the horse that foots the air,

Or climbed among the clouds, or raced the storm.

HERVOR

These feet have crunched the snow of twenty winters.

HERD Only a woman? Harnessed like a man?

HERVOR Only a woman.

HERD Young too?

HERD You'll wait here after dark?

HERVOR So I intend.

HERD I bode ill, and deem we part for ever now.

Sun dips, I dare not longer . . .

HERVOR [seizing him] Stay, my valiant,
Point me out first the grave for which I asked!

[The HERD, arrested in his flight, points to the tomb on the right]

Thanks; take that, and home to your hovel headlong.

[She releases him and gives him a ring. The HERD runs out left front.]

HERVOR [to herself gazing upward]

This silver, pointed dusk heralds a wolf-eyed night.

[glancing round]

The wind that combs this grass tugs like old fear;

And all these barrows hold ill-buried men

Who cannot rest so far from the home-mound

They hoped to lie in. Though I know battle-runes

That plague an enemy or spoil his sleep,

I am ill-taught to rouse this grave-yard gentry—

Might better have brought a wizard,—and some food

To tempt their long fast from its sullenness.

'Twere rash to strike that lintel with this spear:

And yet I'll do it.

[She strikes the lintel with the butt of her spear, causing a dull thud to resound, at which she retreats hastily across left, but soon commences to return]

I have carved death out of a living man;

Shall I now fear, like dwarfish Lapland warlock,

An idol that's the pair to one I've made?

[She approaches the barrow and stands before its door]

Wake, Angantyr! I, Hervor, bid thee wake!

Thy daughter, Tofa's true-born, conjures thee

To hand her out that sword that Swafurlami

Stole from the dwarfs! Am I not thy sole heir?

[Silence]

Surely my life has answered thy heart's wish

As well as that longed-for son's could ever have done?

Hast thou no pride that Vikings call me comrade?

[Silence]

Ha! am I nothing to you? You are dead

And care not whom your fame moulds. Though I be

Child of your spirit, creature of your loins,
I am not anything to you, perhaps?

[Silence]

Then I will rouse your brethen and plague their sleep
Until they bid you speak.

[Taking a step back and raising her voice]

O Harvord, Hiorvord, Rani, Reifnir, Tind,
Heave up that blanket of thick-rooted grass!
Crawl forth, stand up, rouse you to answer me!

[Silence]

O Harvord, Hiorvord, Rani, Reifnir, Tind,
I'll cast a spell shall plague you with the itch;
May your rib-cages swarm as doth an anthill
If you refuse me now the boon I crave:

It ill becomes you ghosts to grudge the world
Those costly weapons that you cannot use.

[A VOICE OUT OF THE DARKNESS

Damp stinking blindness; this is hell.

A SECOND VOICE

What, am I caged in putrid bones?

A THIRD A clinging, rooty, mouldy smell
Is in my nose and I hear groans.

FIRST VOICE Who's there?]

SECOND VOICE [as a figure becomes visible above
the barrow] Tind. Who asked?

FIRST VOICE Rani.

[A second figure appears two paces behind the first,
both are muffled in old cloaks over rusty armour. They
sway sleepily as though limbs and eyes yielded them
but half-service.]

[THE THIRD VOICE issuing again from the grave
visibly surprises them

I, Harvord, through dense darkness raced and rushed
Dwindling the while as fast, find myself here
Small as nit, a needle's point this grave
Vaults hugely over, like the midnight cave.

Yet late I filled a multitude with cheer
 Singing in a torched hall
 Bethronged with flushed faces . . .]
 TIND [interrupting] Out from that stivy charnel,
 Brother, brave the night air.
 I, too came posting backward through the night
 From those great gala plains of light
 Where we with deathless valour laugh and fight.
 RANI [as though to himself, while a third form rises
 between them] A human voice intruded
 And, straight for me,
 The sworded tumult faded like a dream
 As when dims, curdles, thickens
 Mist over pale calm sea,
 Till what has been a fleet shall seem
 To each of forty sail one lonely hulk
 Haunted by booming horns.
 Beclouded thus I hear
 Sounds that seem neither far nor near,
 Neither who speaks nor what is said being clear.
 HERVOR [to the three phantoms who still stagger
 vaguely] I called ye mighty spirits, I, a maid
 Who, yet, in battle, have sent men to hell.
 I called ye, with the whole strength of a heart
 That braves death willingly, needlessly, and I
 Am glad I called,
 Proud as the lark is
 That bids the sun turn out
 When up he rolls.
 RANI [brushing his face with a drowsy arm]
 How lustily she crows!
 I hear but see not.
 TIND [peering towards her] Brother, I glimpse her
 Tall as trim Valkyr
 And yet her smile and her eyes
 Are doubtful and blurred.

HARVORD[advancing past the others as she retreats]
 What wouldst thou, hawk-girl,
 Hen-eagle rather?
 Time here is torture; we long to
 Vacate these musty trappings
 And this damp dim-lighted field of graves.
 HERVOR [coming to a stand left]
 Angantyr, your brother,
 Sired me, yet gat him no son;
 So owes me Tyrfin:
 Yet skulks he and keeps mum
 Hoarding the bright blade
 He never uses
 Yet grudges that I should.
 TIND [laughing] Who wants a heavy stick
 Hammered flat out of iron
 When he wields vision-bright
 Sword keen as his fancy?
 RANI Who cares to mangle
 Clammy blood-spurting flesh
 When he may cleave cleanly
 Stuff healed the same instant,
 And kills not his peer
 But wins from him praise
 For the blow that he dealt him?
 HERVOR 'Tis idle fighting when no man is hurt.
 HARVORD As the flame leapeth
 Up from a dull log,
 So over hacked carcase
 The spirit danceth:
 So from old battlefield
 Tip-toes a bright conflict
 More nimble in beauty,
 Flame-like and clear.
 HERVOR Watching their gold locks
 Combed up from the logs

I too have envied
The intense activity
The up-rushing joy
Of Loki's energetic
And beautiful children.

TIND For this prize men hold cheap
Life in the body,
Wealth, and the ingie
They loved to call theirs—
To dance with this glory.

RANI Splendid this hope was—
That act from approval
Need never be severed
In heart that dared suffer
Any anguish of wounds
Rather than bow to
The blundering sequence
Of events that bully
All earthbound intentions.

HERVOR Ye did well, and I hope to;
But my sire, Angantyr,
Though I am a Viking and brave as himself,
Hoards the iron hard-tempered
That kills all whom it woundeth
Though now he own weapon
That heals what it rippeth
And maketh of fighting
An unmingled glee.

HARVORD He spends small time fighting;
He doubted his wife,
So doubts he begat thee:
His silence is sickness,
No ail of the body,
A canker of thought.

HERVOR Tell him to answer
Or steal the sword from him.

TIND Why should he answer
 Who never comes striding,
 Axe whirled over-head,
 Across the battlefield?
 RANI His wild bursts of laugh and song
 Trolled after feasting
 Ne'er shake Valhalla;
 His stool still stands there,
 No hero astride it.
 HERVOR Where is he then?
 TIND Nay, he is here, child,
 Betodded with scruples
 Like ivy-bound tree;
 His body pretends life
 And prisons his spirit.
 HERVOR Steal the sword from him.
 RANI That were not easy.
 TIND Come let us rouse him.
 ALL THREE PHANTOMS Dost thou hear,
 Angantyr,
 Answer thy daughter;
 Whate'er thou hast thought her,
 She crows with thy spirit.
 [ANGANTYR'S VOICE as before
 What ails thee, maiden, tricked out like a man?
 Art thou brain-wildered or mad-hearted, child,
 To waken dead men?]
 TIND Nay, brother, ail is
 What thou thyself dost; this girl of thine
 Speaks and looks hearty.
 [ANGANTYR'S VOICE
 Be off to your play-ground
 Ye brawling braggers of silly bloodless dreams.]
 TIND
 Then deal with this chick of your hatching as father
 should.

[ANGANTYR'S VOICE

I rather will talk her fair than still be maddened
By your shouts and boasts.]

RANI

Swear thou wilt answer

All her heart asks thee.

[ANGANTYR'S VOICE I swear it by Tyrfing.]

ALL THREE PHANTOMS

Back to the wide plains

Brighter than noonday,

Back to self-acting thought

Not mocked, misdelivered

By blundering thews,

Back to life aptly played

Fair as a boy's hope!

[Having turned they fade and drift out of sight.]

HERVOR Farewell to ye, uncles!

Thanks for your help.—

And now we are private

Let us know one another,

Thou sire of Hervor.

[ANGANTYR'S VOICE Speak on, I hear.]

HERVOR

So we can talk, great fighter and strong man;

No other mortal has lived in my mind

So much as thou, and, now I hear thy voice,

It gratifies like after-battle praise.

[ANGANTYR'S VOICE

No other mortal ever roamed at night

About these mounds. To front thus our abode

Harsh-mouthed with curses, with brandished spear,
with shield,

Helmet and mail-coat is not like a mortal.]

HERVOR

I've always passed for mortal till this day,

And all my body feels that it can die.

[ANGANTYR'S VOICE

Samsey, alas! lies lonely on the brine;
I neither see nor hear like men who die
At home or who, brought back from battle, lie
In the home mound and watch o'er those they leave,
And help them in their need with pregnant dream,
Or word sighed underground. How can I know
But what thou art some changeling—a dwarf's child
Suckled with milk that should have fed my son?]

HERVOR

See here this shank and shin. Brat got by dwarf
Ne'er grew such length of bone: few men have longer.

[ANGANTYR'S VOICE

Perchance, on stormy night, thy mother sleeping,
Some Asa-woman stooped above the cradle
And left her daughter in the place of mine;
These goddesses have no time to rear girls.]

HERVOR

Though I first crowed in Asgard, still I've borne
Thy daughter's name and have forced faith from all
That none save Angantyr could get a girl
So like a boy.

Ho! ho! I think I spy thee lying there,
Like a felled oak-trunk green with glimmering moss.
[As twilight deepens into night ANGANTYR'S form
begins to appear through the mound as though the
darkness rendered its turfs transparent]

ANGANTYR

Sinks not thy heart to look upon the dead?

HERVOR

Nay, but leaps up to see thee, though as dimly
As in some black tarn a drowned man by starlight!
I just make out that giant limb, thy sword-arm.
Come, reach me up from there my heritage,
Tyrfing, the famous blade which Dwale forged
And Swafurlami stole and that arm fought with.

ANGANTYR [who can now be seen lying within the mound, head towards the door, like an effigy carved in beryl]

Neither father, son nor kinsman buried me,
But foeman dug this grave and raised this cairn:
And doubtless Arrow Odd took Tyrfing home.

HERVOR

A lie! He feared the curse, and must have died
For Tyrfing's sake, not kindly in his bed;
Reproached for some sad deed, not praised by all,
Had Tyrfing once been his. Such lies won't serve:
Tell me naught but the truth! Why art thou loth
To deal thine only child her heritage?

ANGANTYR

Thy heritage! Is all I leave this curse
That binds my heir to do some shameful deed?
Mad girl! know, if the fear of doing wrong
Leaves thee undaunted, there are other terrors.

HERVOR

I know I must do things that I shall rue.
What man who seeks his ecstasy in battle
Can ponder every bloody hour unshamed?
Even you twelve death-dealing sons of Arngrim
When you'd hewn down the whole of Hialmar's ship-
mates

On yonder beach, fought on with boles of fir:
So when you saw himself and Arrow Odd
Returning where the forest shoreward thins
Wellnigh exhausted by that wretched waste
Of battle frenzy, you
Must counter their fresh onset, and, though twelve
'Gainst only two, in spite of Tyrfing, fall.

ANGANTYR

The shame of those blows dealt on bloodless stuff
Is not what cankers recollection now;
The curse had worked before I landed here.

Though some one deed bring shame, it is by tens
I'll count the deeds that shall splice fame to fame—
Making one saga of my life and thine!

Do what thou canst, but with a cleaner sword.

The deadliest is the cleanest; sure to kill,
It leaves no scare-crow halt and maimed to dog you.

It failed to kill thy mother whom it wounded:
Her livid forehead still reproaches me.

Is it then true? that thou scratchedst her brow
With Tyrfing, though she had not played thee false?

Hast thou dared doubt her?

HERVOR The thing was hard to credit.
And then she smiled avouching it, as though
Her words were all at variance with her knowledge.
I want Tyrfin'g not to scratch women with
But to kill men.

ANGANTYR Women mould men : must seem
Wry-natured then, destroying woman's work.

Men kill what man begot, burn house and gear,
Shaped by their painful toil, more slowly far;
All life warps thus;
Sex makes no odds:

The she-bear's hug is fatal as the male's;
And wolf's fang is no savager the she-wolf's;
A boy is born defenceless as a girl,
Yet, armed, soon kings it over every brute;
Likeness to man obtains esteem for woman.
What does life offer better than a sword?
Shall milk and teeming nannies be my care?

Or, keen for trade, must I lie about felts
And furs and cloths to some reluctant buyer,
Then anguish while the hearty Vikings singing
Carry my wealth down to their full-gorged ship?
In wassail shall I drown thought how I live
Only for food and drink—to be alive
To-morrow bigger-bellied than to-day?
Is one of these the life you'd choose for me?
ANGANTYR [as he speaks unearthly flames burst
through the mound's door and marish fires wake up
the distant dunes with blue and violet lights]
Thou art indeed web of my flesh and spirit,
All of one piece with my few years of manhood.
But look around, betray thy hidden woman;
Hell's gates now swing ajar; the graves gape wide;
The island is ablaze and snorts and groans!
In fire like this lay Tyrfinn, glowing white,
Ere Dwale plunged it hissing into snow:
Back to thy ship! Haste, girl, while yet there's time!

HERVOR

Dead men can light grim fire, but 'tis the sun
My eyes blench from, not this. Thy daughter's knees
Should make shift not to quail, though ghost at this door
Stretched limp hand forth to touch her. Reach the blade
That the dwarfs smithied here; nothing is gained
Hiding it; flame and noise and smoke are bootless.

ANGANTYR

The slayer of Hialmar lies beneath my shoulders,
Hilt and blade wrapped in fire. No maid on earth
Dare put her hand to it.

HERVOR

I'm game to grasp
That hot hilt, risking a scorched palm; and quickly
Could cool it in this grass, then stroke the blade
To let it know I love good workmanship.
Look, when I wave my spear these elf flames limp
And droop and start aside; the draught my shield fans

TOFA Courage to do; none to avouch what's done!

ANGANTYR Pelt me with gibes!

TOFA [reprehending herself]

Hey day! how bitter tongued are all wronged folk:

They relish seeming excused for giving pain.

I do intend not to reproach you, husband;

For often still my smile recalls our joy—

Those hugging nights and days that dreamlike fled.

HERVOR He has admitted you were true to him.

TOFA Listen, you grew so proud as you grew tall

I lacked the heart to grapple with your doubts;

I'd lost the rank that you were winning back

With the whole tension of your wrestling youth;

And, faced by all men's scorn in you, I dared not

Flourish a truth no tongue save mine could vouch for;

But dumbly smiled, being mocked by what I knew.

HERVOR

You were hard placed yet . . .

TOFA Yet not,—but listen!

'Twas near Upsala; when the ships were moored,

My husband's brothers sent to bid its king

Weigh his fair daughter 'gainst his town. Meanwhile

They diced and wrangled who'd have Ingaborg

When once her father should consent to yield

Her famous beauty to their threats of pillage.

ANGANTYR Hearing is torture, so prolong it not.

TOFA

Patience; truth lives in the whole, not in a half.

—Listening in dreamy bliss, suddenly I

Start, for my Angantyr swears by Tyrfin

Ingaborg shall be his; and I, a fool,

Leap up and rate him with a vixen's tongue.

HERVOR

It asked a beating, done before his comrades.

TOFA

He seized my wrists and dragged me to our ship,

And down the covered hold. There threw me, kneeled
And stretched my hair across the oaken bench,
Sawing with Tyrfin'g through it to the wood,
Rolling its heavy thickness to and fro,
Till all was severed jaggedly, as near
My neck's scruff as could be. Then, while I
Lay sobbing, bruised and broken by his strength,
He with the blade's tip lifts my face and grins.
ANGANTYR [his excitement causing him to glow
more brightly]

I see blood zig-zag over thy wet features.

TOFA Old friend, I'll set things right before I end.

HERVOR I marvel you can speak so now to him:
Having so suffered, my resentment would
Have grown with years, yet you call him 'old friend.'

TOFA

My memory's treasures consoled me for that wrong.
The drudge who once was queen wore her mind's best
As offset to her actual garb's disgrace.

Well, on the day my doom fell, I lay there
While he derisively gibed me, 'Thus teach I
Thee that thou art my thing, my bed, my dainty,
And, no leave asked, I'm free to toss thee away,
And lie on new bed, taste fresh honey-cakes.'

ANGANTYR [dimming again slightly]

Man's body hungers after various women,
Even though his heart content itself with one.

TOFA

I'm coming soon to your excuse; don't spoil it.
—Hialmar, Upsala's friend, had been betrothed
To Ingaborg, and while I lay there sobbing,
Sudden and loud, a horn announced his challenge:
His comrade, Arrow Odd, himself, their men
To meet the sons of Arngrim and their ships' crews
On Samsey. 'Twas agreed, and in ten days
I, big with child, a widow, stood, disfigured

And shorn, before the King and Arrow Odd,
The sole survivor from that bloody fight.
I stammered, hot with shame, and both laughed "Wife
Of Angantyr?" if he did this to thee
It was because he could not call thee wife
A second longer, having proved thee false.'

ANGANTYR

Nothing can lift this load of shame off me.

TOFA

Nay, now I'll speak what must be said for thee:

—That they spoke but as every man then spake
Of Angantyr. It was not like himself!

No, this cursed blade, whenever poised or swung,
Sent through his arm a flush of nettling warmth
That drove his senses from his handsome head.

HERVOR

Every edged weapon has a fevering charm,
Though those who daily feel, resist it best;
Dalliance with you, 'tis likely, had withheld him
Too long from fence and combat.

TOFA

Girl, this sword's lure

Always has proved irresistible.

He acted under it as his image might,
Stalking a nightmare. I was sure 'twas so;
And freed my dead man from all taint of blame,
When first you laughed; you laughed at two months
old.

ANGANTYR

Death is all loss.

TOFA Poor man, you never heard our baby crow.

—And now, my daughter, do you want this curse
That must contrive your death as it did his,
Loading you first with some such deed of shame,
As far from all your proper actions as
That fury was unlike him?

HERVOR

Mother, mother,

To see you there holding that iron, sure

That you can mould the growth of twenty years!—
Do now what should have been begun when I
Lay on your lap, or stood beside your knee!

TOFA

What do you mean, girl? Answer what I asked.

HERVOR

The curse is in my blood. That sword may be
A tempting skewer to spit man like a snipe on;
The inlay metals are exquisitely patterned;
But the whole drive, that makes it deadly, tingles
Here in my fingers, throbbing from heart and brain
Before I touch it. Who that has killed man,
Would seek excuse from an old-muttered curse?
I live for bloodshed, trained, tempered, ready.
That deed of mine which brings on me remorse
Shall find a kindlier judgment done by Tyrfin
Than with a nameless blade—not be more certain.
Give him to me!

TOFA May my hand wither first!

HERVOR O mother, you waste time; I long to wield
That shaft of light you hold so awkwardly,
As though it were a shovel or a broom.

ANGANTYR [starting half up and leaning on his
hands to watch them]

Hear, then, thy father, maid. Thou art a woman,
And thou shalt bear a son whom men will call
Heidreck, and he shall be the mightiest man
Then walking 'neath the blue tent of the sun.
Wilt thou load him in death as I am laden—
With never-fagged remorse that turns, year in
Year out, one millstone thought upon another?
Leave Tyrfin here and Heidreck ne'er shall own it.

HERVOR My son must be a warrior Viking-bred;
He will as I fight; why then should I fret
Foreboding him bad quarrels ere he's gotten?

TOFA You talk; your son has cost you nothing yet!

When you lie faint from labour and they hold up
The small plump kernel you were broken for,
You'll feel him precious then and wish that now
You had not been so ignorantly stubborn.

HERVOR

No man in pain is ever quite himself;
But thought grows sounder when he can leap up.

TOFA

A fine sound thought, it does one good to think it!
The mother ponders on her boy as cursed
To dip his gleeful bravery in bloodguilt;
She watches him, as I watched you, all tense
Eager and flushed to master manliness;
And does not yearn to separate man's valour
From man's case-hardened ease in doing wrong
And teach him to be brave some faultless way!

HERVOR

What woman can be sure her son will never
Do deeds as wry as those his grandsire did?
But though her father's wealth had all been lost,
Though she herself ne'er shared in foray's booty,
Grant her but owner of sword forged, embellished
By the most famous dwarf smith of them all,—
With such a dowry she shall choose her son
The bravest tall begetter in the world.

ANGANTYR

Will not that husband claim both sword and curse?

TOFA

Ha! I foresee you'll fight with him for it.

HERVOR

Must life be spent preventing the foreboded
It would not be that which I feel it is
Free and creative in the face of doom—
Surprising the old, the dead, the dwarfs, the gods
With young luck that escapes by an hair's breadth
From the still-growing threat of foregone horror.

ANGANTYR [you feel he would kneel up did the mound leave him room]

O, wild, blind-hearted, feather-headed child!

HERVOR

Was not Tyrfing blessed too as well as cursed?

The wound it deals shall never heal, and he

Who wields it must die fighting to retain it—

The Viking-prayed-for end that wins Valhalla!—

I think my son, if he were twenty now,

And stood where I do, would not hesitate,

But take it as I take it now for him.

ANGANTYR [in great excitement]

Tofa, give me the sword.

TOFA

Here it is, husband.

HERVOR [runs between her mother and the mound's door and attempts to catch her hands]

TOFA No, Hervor, not so fast, the sword is mine; The curse is on me; I must fight for it.

[TOFA in her turn makes a feint to attack HERVOR, who closes with her and wrenches the sword from her—but TOFA still clings with both hands to her wrist and closing her elbow down, pinches the sword against her side; then, lunging forward, falls and bears its point against the ground. HERVOR must stagger to retain hold on the hilt, and topples over her mother, burying the sword beneath their combined weights.]

ANGANTYR [during the struggle has cried out]

Oh for a draught of blood; a wolf's, a dog's,

A sheep's heart full! Then could I forth and part

These women, recapture the envenomed sword!

Instead

My strength exhausts itself with feeling helpless.

I weaken, weaken, ebbing out to blankness.

[He has fallen back and settled into his original position and melted into the darkness when HERVOR kneeling up and lifting TOFA carefully off the sword, as she

draws it from under her, cries] Blood! you bleed fast!
Mother, your deed! not mine! Own that it is.

TOFA [speaking in pain]

At least, Tyrfin'g has done the worst he can do
Held in your hand.

HERVOR Were but that dwarf here now
I'd sheathe the whole curse in his shapeless body.

TOFA He's nothing, help me! ah! I'm glad this pain
Will save you from worse trouble!

HERVOR Mother, mother,
I did not help you do it.

TOFA [in dire pain] I grasped the hilt
So had to die. Lay me by Angantyr
And say I saved you.

HERVOR What will relieve this anguish?
[She watches her mother helplessly]

Why, there your smile comes back! I do believe,
You have more joy to die than I to live.

TOFA Be happy, child. Ah!

HERVOR [after watching her in silence]
 Again your eyes laugh!

I never thought to envy any woman,
Since none was half so much a man as I:
But now I envy *you* I envied least.

TOFA

O, let me hear you own that I have saved you!

HERVOR

"Saved me,"—no! made me feel as if his hand,
That deformed god's, that black dwarf's hand had
forged me,

Plunged me twenty times in winter, brandished
Me o'er his head, then struck at you with me.

TOFA

Lay down that sword! Squeeze my hand! Tighter, tighter!

HERVOR

I never dreamt the curse could cause such pain.

TOFA It cost perhaps as much to bring you forth;
But I was young then.

HERVOR Mother!

TOFA Live happy.

HERVOR

I could wish never more to be light-hearted.

TOFA Grip my hand hard! You cannot give me half
The pain I need to help me bear this, ah!

HERVOR

Is it so dire?

TOFA Oh, it is worse than all!

[Dies]

HERVOR

There, thank the Norns she's dead! Oh! Call that back!
The word was out before I knew its meaning!

[A pause of horror]

Part of my life has slipped away with hers.

—You saved me. Can't you hear me say, you saved me?

—If only she could move again or speak!

ANGANTYR [becoming visible once more]

Her hand is in my hand.

HERVOR She's dead then? dead!

All I can do now is to lay her out

With that respect I never showed her living.

[She lays her shield down beside Tyrfin in order to
compose the body with its head in the doorway of the
barrow, then rises from her knees.]

They lie there, side by side, Tyrfin and this

That Tyrfin carved out of a happy bride,

This little wizened mother.

Though she had acted foully as men said,

I, at least, might have staked much on her truth.

Why did I not, but doubted? Was it only

Because her eyes so twinkled?

[stooping to raise the sword] Tyrfin's mine:

I thought to hold him would as much uplift me

As to have conquered Norway. Far from that,
I'm quite down-hearted!

[TOFA'S VOICE out of the grave
There! I shall escape soon!]

HERVOR

Was that her voice?

[stooping over her] She feels and looks quite dead.

[TOFA'S VOICE as before

Though pain imposes still, 'tis but as gasps
And tremors shake a scared child in the arms
To which its panic fled.]

HERVOR Her lips have not stirred!

Her spirit speaks then—Mother!

[TOFA'S VOICE out of the grave
Slowly, sight clears,

Back over the bodily tumult that was life.

I view it as you, from some warm homestead's door,

A mile inland, might scan a stormy sea.

My splendid child, the living look ahead,

Leave all that's past to us and free thy mind!]

HERVOR

I look ahead to see myself or wife,

Or mother of him to whom I'd give this sword.

How can I give it, who am cursed to die

Fighting the doomed man who must own it next?

I'll bury it with thee, and leave it here.

[Lays down the sword beside the body once more]

ANGANTYR [shining more strongly]

Take the sword up, own and enjoy it long,

Thou wouldst return for it, ere the week's out,

If left here; won in fight, 'tis thine, thy doom.

HERVOR

I dread possession of it; let it lie!

[TOFA'S VOICE

Take up the sword. I bid you, for I hope

The wickedest torture it was charged with spent!

[TOFA'S VOICE Or thy deliverance.]
HERVOR [catching fire]
I'm glad that thy blood helped my father's build me.
ANGANTYR [dimming]
Fetch aid to bury her. Peace is not peace
So long as I must dread those picks and spades,
And that inroad of noise and glare, when they
Shall lay her body where her spirit lies.
HERVOR [stooping, lays down the sword and takes
up her spear to which she knots two corners of cloak;
then approaching the mound says:]
I will come back with men to ope this mound
And lay her light bones next
Thy cruelly loved bones.
[she plants the spear in the mound above then
standing back says:] This flag shall guide me
[The light dies out of ANGANTYR]
HERVOR [comes forward, resumes her shield and
sword, then gazes out left]
There greys the utmost east; though my feet burn
To meet the sun, I must show him my back
And endure to be outstripped and caught like a thief.
[Resting the flat of TYRFING on her shoulder she
strides out left.]

CURTAIN

MOODS OF DESIRE

LOVE'S FIRST COMMUNION

'**H**EAR me! answer! Thou, so sweet—
Speak, May Evening, tell if ever
I with love with love may meet?
Or on land, or far seas over,
Near me, now, or soon, or never?
Whisper! am I born a lover
As were in the days of yore
Pelleas and Pellenore?
Or is early death for me
Born to prowess on the sea?'

'—Listen, ponder, understand!
Love lies ambushed in each bud
Like a lady's maiden hand
Stowed in warm and scented glove;
And as through her veins the blood
Circling sweetens, so flows love
Like ripe syrup through a fruit,
Secret tingling rich and mute,—
Like, ah! like on midnight hush
Tears that under eyelids gush.'

'Ardent softly-breathing Even,
What thou whisperest that is truth;
Through and through me throbs belief:
By thy star, the first in heaven,
Hesperus the early bright,
Tell me, shall I love? "For brief,
Brief thy days!"
Song there is thus wails on youth,
"For the May time, no time stays,"
So it says;
Speak, then speak, ere thou be night
Dread with stars and extreme height.'

DESIRE MUSES

TO braid a crown of daisies
Meet for your dusky hair—
To lead you through mountain places
Suiting your solemn air—
Hear your laughter, buoyant thunder
Like the torrent's tunnelling under
Coloured rocks to issue glancing
In a thousand small jets dancing
Down a stair of rinsèd stones—
To heap your lap with scented cones,
Fir cones! would make a giant of joy
Out of a timid and awkward boy.

URGENT

LEARN of my glance greeting
Yours, coy eyes,—
Learn of my heart's beating,
Too quiet breast!
"Is it not time?" joy cries;
Are you not inly pressed?
Shows this hard rose-bud pink
And not your heart?
Look, its green eyelids wink,
Impelled apart.
Can all I glow to say
Not reach you?
Not teach you
What only one may?

Learn of my pain kindness
Even through tears,—
Learn of my will's blindness
Not to regard
Prudence—for old maids' ears!—
Prudence their lives hath marred.
Happiness wins reprieves
Though harsh fools doom;
Birds nest in hovel eaves
And youth finds room.
Could I not house you? say!—
Not lead you?
Not feed you
As only one may?

SUMMER LIGHTNING

I WOULD rather ruffle leaves,
Pillaging a vine,
Than 'neath my tresses shelter thieves,
Robber lips at mine.

I would rather feel the rain,
When standing under cover,
Course my out-stretched hands amain,
Than tears shed by a lover.

O Bird in the night awake,
Thou almost mak'st me weep!
Why should thy voice so shake?
Is it thy pinions ache?
What hindereth thee to sleep?
I want not to love and I will not . . . Oh!
Love's not worth so much! and thou dost know,
I know, and all the world too knows,
No girl had loved unless she chose!

THE CONVENT THRESHOLD

VEIL thee, too vision-fed to answer love
That was not to the *when* and *how* exact
Of aspiration—failed to counteract
Coldness that fits ambition like a glove.

Too eager for election, or with hope
Too dazzled to foresee the future's force,
Which needs must hound thee onward toward remorse
Proving, if love, naught else with Time may cope!

Then wilt thou weep and be all, all alone,—
More lonely than the cavern heart of hills
Which from the stalactite the slow drop fills
In falling with weak sound—a tear's on stone.

REASON ENOUGH

“**W**HO knows what a man may think?
To whom do the birds confide
Whether she will have tears to drink
And an hungry heart to hide?
Come, bandage your eyes,
Give ear though he lies;
For milkmaids and queens and gypsy-princesses
Dream and kiss blindfold or starve upon guesses.”

She sang these words and curtseyed: my heart said
That though all heard my face alone was red,—
Though all hands clapped her mine alone kept still,—
Yet I perchance to praise had the best will.
Now sails she, like a spirit taking leave,
Through those glass doors to where the gardens gloom
While dim stars filter through the filmy eve.
Would she walk lonely through sweet solemn places?
She should be viewed while their spell on her face is;
Break free, my soul, good manners are thy tomb!

AN AGED BEAUTY'S PRAYER

MARVELLOUS Venus, listen, please,
For all comes back to me again,
While in the limes the pilfering bees
Hum, as once did each suburb-lane
Where loitered idle legionaries.

For thou wast very good to me
Long since when war was in the land,
And with loud quarrels soldiery
Made it unsafe for girls to stand
Changing their chatter gay and free.

Then was I precious in all eyes;
And to thine own men would compare
Her charms, who, with a prim disguise
Of glee that knew they needs must stare,
Noticed no jot their courtesies.

For one, my lover recognized,
I fancied no neglect too much,
And overweening tantalized
Him, till my sister's hand would touch
Mine, pitying so where I despised.

We slept in one room, she and I
With cousin Portia, and they had
The double-bed, for I would lie
Distant, but desperately sad,
Upon a pallet separately.

How oft, disdaining friendly chat,
I stripped apart and slipped to bed—
A queen who could not stoop to that—
Whose heart dead for each 'Dear' they said,
With every kiss went pit-a-pat.

Between chill sheets I lay and ached,
And heard their twin breaths tuned to sleep:
Nor might my longing thirst be slaked
By tears which crossed my cheeks, in deep
Self-pity hushed for fear they waked.

Past cornice pillarets I watched
The moon's proud progress, till I rose
And slow the lattice-door unlatched.
The lamp shook, but I kept it close
Lest from their dreams they should be snatched.

When I looked forth, all—all was white,
The uphill fields, the well-worn road;
Clover with scent had filled the night,
Though far Vesuvius' crater glowed,
Haycocks seemed snow in the wan light.

Nor thought I if, nigh yon fierce glare,
Watching the wild spark fly the flame,
Thou, wrapped at full-length in thy hair,
Musedst how many maids, who came
To no good end of love, there were;—

Nor pictured, near thine husband's forge
Where iron bendeth meek to him,
Thee muse, how warmth, which shapes no scourge,
Can be resisted for a whim,
And heart in heart refuse to merge.

All wintry—save one leafy mass
A gust left fondling, to escape,
Kiss my feet cold as in mown-grass
Dead flowers, and thence from heel to nape,
Estranging skin and gown, to pass.

“The moon’s is sheer attractiveness”
I thought “gives light but doth not love:
Beauty was meant maybe to bless;
But can it e’er be blessed enough?
Day’s is such spendthrift kindliness:—

Swallows with grace, from hammock-huts
Cemented neatly to the wall,
Plunge through light, where the pigeons struts,
As gem-like plumes could never fall.—
Sleep on mere prettiness Night shuts,

Nor brooks a bird her realm serene;
Twixt mirror-waters and the moon
No forward females intervene,
Nor lass, nor lad with lilted tune
Vexes complacence in my queen.”

I closed the shutter, and then turned
With face which, like the moon come close,
Wan from my mirror vaguely yearned;
Then screamed with bare foot on a rose—
His gift which last eve had been spurned.

They woke—I leapt back into bed:
They stared about still dazed with dreams.
“Ah, did you hear it too?” I said,
Feigning to wake at mine own screams,
Squeezing my smarting foot which bled.

At first we listened, breathing hard,
Then talked ten minutes at the most;
They guessed ’twas some cat in the yard,
But I was sure it was a ghost:
Their dreams were very little marred.

I learned while they new slumber drank,
My heart had found a voice which wooed
Pillows to life : as drowsed I sank,
Mine seemed plump roosting doves who cooed,
As my head cuddled in to rank.

Then dreams through calm night didst thou fling—
Tumultuous birds of passage, borne
From Paphos, battling on the wing
Past Pompeii, till red, at dawn,
Showed villa-roofs with blood-shedding.

My feather-head to penance woke—
Sore plots to hide sheets stained by blood—
With furtive kisses to revoke
Threats that thy trampled deep-wronged bud
Made, flushed like highly angered folk.

Of such portentous rain the talk
Was awed to whisper all day long—
I saw poor mother white as chalk,
When my joy burst the gates of song;
For he had won me on our walk.—

Marvellous Venus, crowned by time
My locks are white as moon-lit snow,
My children's chubby children climb
Up by my knees, to sit and crow
Perched on the ruin of my prime.

For one thing I petition thee:—
While generations from these rise,
Let me ne'er lack heiress, to be
Like, as maid may, to her whose eyes
For peril far surpass the sea.

A DUET

"**F**LOWERS nodding gaily, scent in air,
"Flowers posied, flowers for the hair,
"Sleepy flowers, flowers bold to stare—"
"Oh, pick me some!"

"Shells with lip, or tooth, or bleeding gum,
"Tell-tale shells, and shells that whisper 'Come,'
"Shells that stammer, blush, and yet are dumb—"
"Oh, let me hear!"

"Eyes so black they draw one trembling near,
"Brown eyes, caverns flooded with a tear,
"Cloudless eyes, blue eyes so windy clear—"
"Oh, look at me!"

"Kisses sadly blown across the sea,
"Darkling kisses, kisses fair and free,
"Bob-a-cherry kisses 'neath a tree—"
"Oh, give me one!"

Thus sang a king and queen in Babylon.

THAT LAND

WOULD that I might live for ever
Where those who make me happy dwell!
Desire doeth excellently well,
Now, wooing me,
For, oh, she never
Nameth any other place!
There ease weds grace;
There thought is free,
Born like a smile upon the face,
Expressed as simply as a child
Kisseth its playmate, laughing gaily,
There, there the courteous, joyous, mild
Train life to beauty daily!

There thought is free; for life is bound
Religiously, and sings while serving;
No inner echoes counsel swerving,
All strengthen life,
Till sought be found;
Old valours rise to share
Ordeals there;
Near, like a wife,
Stands effort's outcome, bodied fair,
Not fettered with dead thoughts, not fainting
Because the nightmare world hath lain
Athwart her hopes, but love acquainting
With beauty ever again.

Ever again and again
Filling the eyes of our child
With the milk of Paradise,—
Of which the soul is fain,
For which the heart is wild,
And tears are in the eyes:

Ah! that milk of Paradise
Is happiness,
Is power to bless;
What balmy air to halcyon's wing
That power to those who make me glad is;
To bind my life, in bonds to sing,
The way such freedom may be had is;—
The way to gain the power to bless,
The one way to win happiness.

DESIRE SINGS

IF only I were the sky,
What days would be thine!
No more than thou would'st of a kind,
Whether sunshine, or shower, or wind!
If the heavens above thee were I,
How the stars would shine!
What a friend the moon would be
To guard or companion thee!

Thy days thou should'st fill like a rill
That has found the best
Of seaward paths, and gay
Takes bedded in flowers its way,
Were mine but the life of a hill:
But, were I the west,
Thou would'st sink all beauty and light
Home to my heart every night.

LOVE'S FAINTNESS ACCEPTED

AH, love, love is not what
We hope, we dream it is;
Not sure of victory.
'Tis hot, but pain is hot;
Swords wound, so may a kiss.
Though love be energy,
Should flow a current in a sea,
A passing-by of life by life,
Of force by force, fire by lightning, strife
By battle, eclipse of zest by zeal;—
Yet slowly the inevitable seal
At times informeth the half-molten malleable,
Stiff hours of life whose surfaces congeal
Before the lordly signet hath repeal;
Even then 'tis stamped so plain, so strangely well,
That the impression may be traced by all,—
Blind fate, sceptre, crown, and golden ball.

DOUBTFUL DAWN

WAKE, Love; I am early woken!
Ah, Love, I am ignorant whether,
So many hearts as thou hast broken,
In aught thou canst be clever!
Will he for ever
Love me, this man thou has set in my heart?
Will he be true? shall I bear a true part?

Wake, Love; I am ready: waken!
Love, follow thou me till time's ending!
So many hearts as thou hast forsaken,
Thou canst but need befriending—
Have foes a-bending
Brows on thee:—come, come into my heart;
Take shelter; turn good and oh! never depart!

LET NOW SUFFICE

THE lily yearns to leave her stem,
And sail forth on the moonlit stream;
Yon small cloud petal-white above,
Floats by in envied ecstasies:
There are who only long for love,
O'er whom we raptured soar serene;
For all that ere this night hath been
We can forget;
There are who kneel on aching knees,
They fain would hear the morning breeze
That blows not yet.

There are who hate us—what of them?
Mere motes, that travel not the beam
With those who each a consort own,
But single, dark and cold must drift
Through regions where light is not known!
Since rapture tides two hearts between,
All that before this night hath been
Forget, forget!
Ask not who gave; enjoy the gift!
Not yet is day; fears are too swift.
Not yet, not yet!

LOVE'S FAINTNESS DEFIED

KISS me!

Are we not farther from to-day
Than is to-morrow?

Steeped in reality, what love possesses,
Time doth but borrow;

Kiss me!

Canst fear what any voice can say,
When all man's knowledge clearly must be guesses?

Whilst joy is ours, like dogs to gain a bone
They'll fawn on us for what we leave alone.

Clasp me!

Like sands the falling moments close,
Stifling the weary;

To-morrow from to-day no force can sever,
Keep thou but near me.

Clasp me!

Canst shudder at a falling rose,
When folly's proof must be to prate of 'ever'?

Whilst joy is ours, they'll seek us out to learn:
Those only died who, loved, made faint return!

MUCH VIRTUE IN IF

IF I were king of this broad land,
And you were England's queen,
All high-roads should be glades of lawn,
All byways mossed and green;

The seashore should be lengthened out
With beach, and rock, and sand,
Till the most rural hamlet lay
Scarce seven mile inland.

Yea, long sea arms should wind and threar
Our midlands through and through,
That foresters and shepherd lads
Might watch the salt and blue.

Then caravans and pedlars,
Replacing shop and street,
Should bring folk dainty things to wear
And luscious things to eat.

A few of the great changes these,
On which we might decide,
If I were in Westminster throned
With you crowned at my side.

NOWHERE AND ONWARD

THERE is no reason we should write,
Or read, or speak, or sing, to-night;
Profusely starred the sky awaits us,
Our souls may thitherward take their flight.

No one alone, nor three, nor four,
Nor any counted number more,
Can make of thought such rapt keen joyance
As thrills two voyaging towards no shore.

Twin spirits cleave the vast of air
Best if their bodies do not stir:
Come, breast the stillness, and on and ever
Dip at a moment and rise a pair!

Birds, cleaving either night or day,
Flit one before, one after; they
Straggle, form clots or clouds, but never
Keep pace when flying; be that our way.

Though toil and zeal be often crossed,
No tick of time enjoyed is lost;
One hour replete with satisfaction
Old kings would prize at a great war's cost.

REGRETS

SOME things that we shall never know,
Are eloquent to-day,
Belittling our experience, though
We loved and were gay:

For those, whose younger hands are free
With a body not their own,
Taste delicacies of intimacy
Which we have not known.

Primrose, narcissus, daffodil
In sudden April plenty,
Flourish as tender fancies thrill
Spouses at twenty!

RENOVATION

WOULD that I were naked Adam,
And you like Eve ran bare,
Though all our friends and other folk
Unborn, unthought-of, were!

Should we miss house or street or town,
Gossip, tea or cake,
Might we but climb a breeze-rocked pine,
Doze there or lie awake?

Ah, nothing grieves that is itself:
Say, are these millions men
Who, boxed in slate-roofed rows, there sicken
For sea, forest or glen?

ON FOUR POPLARS VIEWED FROM THE
STUDY WINDOW AT WELCOMBE.
TO ROBERT & ELIZABETH TREVELYAN

THERE stand before mine eyes four trees
Beatified, filled with the breeze!
Ah! might a man so intermingle
With her who makes him no more single!—
Enter and revel through each part,—
No more confined to sex and heart,
But fluttering even to toes and fingers,
Visitant ecstasy that lingers
Until its absence shall be boon;
Then, rich as she from sleep comes, soon
Return to refind form in hers,
As breeze to leaves, as voice to verse!

Four poplars love thee, brother Wind,
Nay, thou art with thy thousands twinned;
Thine only flesh, their visible bliss,
Proveth man's substance much amiss!
Small wonder! prosy fools, who see
The viewless wind wed with a tree,
Cry "God so fills the universe!"
Their thought but makes a bad world worse;
God does not, and man cannot, fill
Created object with his will!
Wise poets envy the wind's lot
Which quivers poplar it is not,
So would they thrill a song and die,
Yet, frustrate, live, and, mocked, still try!

A PRAYER

I

HIDE me for ever, hide me now,
For all my will is frustrate. Take,
O take my thought, as thou
From Semele didst Bacchus take;
But first, O flood me with thy might,
Let me consume in thy delight!

So may I die, yet dying know
Zeus was a partner to create
This beauty ripe in me. Ah, show
Mine eyes thy power, and elate
My throbbing heart with confidence,
Thou father of all joy intense!

Thou father of this intense pain,
Thou filledst me with avid thought
That cannot breathe this air. How fain
Was I to live! and long have sought—
My hopes by holiness forbidden—
To be from thy light safely hidden.

II

Ah, happy Semele! she was
By satisfaction blinded:
Likewise in one bright sheet of awe,
Let me, let me, be winded:
Free me from all that is not thine,
All fault that only can be mine;
Though flesh dread love so male and mighty,
Whose single aim reproves all flighty
Impuissant sparkles of desire;
As firefly by a forest fire
Lap thou my separate will to shine,—
Be light and glory wholly thine!

III

To Semele's bed by midnight came,
In the fair flower-months of her youth,
A love she could not see or name.
Thine ardent soul, which is but as it gives—
For bliss is all its function, name and truth—
Near her heart lived, near my thought lives.
Ah! she grew pregnant with a son divine,
Whose life from hers absorbed the best, till she,
Exhausted from within, night-long did pine
For thee to take him from her and set free
That residue of weakness, all that seemed
Oppressive to the wealth with which she teemed;
So take my thought, so take my life from me!

A SECOND PRAYER

COME nearer yet!
A child, I thought truth would commune
With me, if not at once, yet soon.

The day I wed
I cried the more wildly for regret,
"Come nearer, nearer still!" and fed
Impatient hope with that embrace
Which, as who washing dips his face,
Plunges the one soul in the supreme
Effort of another's aspiration,
And leaves both streaming with elation.

Having toiled for skill and worth, I cry—
"Let me know something ere I die!
"Not merely the measured husk and its imprint,—
"Not words left life-lorn if they more than hint,—
"Not woman known but as our limbs are known,—
"But that within me which is not mine own.
"Naught save the never seen or heard or felt,
"Which yet precedes my thought and will, precedes
"Every appearance wherewith I have dealt,
"Is or could crown the essence of my needs.
"Not life, not love, (for love, for life, are mere
"Operations of adroit and complex gear,
"Unless we do suppose transfused through them
"This which claims fealty as of right more clear
"Than thought's or wife's or child's): though this
condemn
"My every action, yet when the day's done
"This kinder seems than I to my small son."

ANSWERED PRAYER

“SOON, soon!

 S Mine shall it be again
With shrilling blades a diagram
Of the swallows swooping game
To cut on the polisht plane!”
His knuckles stiffen and yet the tame
Pond’s persistent ripples cram
The youngster’s ears with their lapping tune
“No, not so soon,
No, not so soon.”

O Cantor, who thy song entonest
Within that chamber closed with lids,
Whose fringe of lashes quite forbids
Day peer through rose-dark where thou thronest,
Is thy presence but a dream
Of voice, the fragrance of its own theme?
Tell me, if I conceive aright
That spirit, as water chills to ice,
Hardens to temper of that night
Which is the truth and numbs us twice,
Once on conceiving that *know* we can never,
Once on accepting that bitter forever?
Tell me, when pride can no more strive,
If thou and thy fellows leap alive,
Race our trance over and cut clear
A charactery
That beggars the swallow’s flight like curves
Of wind that skates the sea,
Or streaked and tapering cloud that swerves
Across the zenith, white and free
In yet illegible ecstasy?

Soon, soon,
A spirit crystal smooth,
That warps beneath those cursive feet,
Those swallow-like gliders fine,—
May I receive the truth
Swept in hierograph divine,
And ring aloud with rapture fleet?
What aileth thee to pause, then croon
“No, not so soon,
No, not so soon.”?

TO E. L. GRANT WATSON

OWHEREFORE tempt me with quaint images,
Figment for shows whereof no eyes report?
Richer is ignorance than phantasies;
Choose words that foot the ground for your escort!
More powerful than passion, patient as stone,
Behind the 'I' of which fools' lips are fond,
Where even pride must let the void alone,
Gentleness, too receptive to respond,
Listens to prayer and shriek as a calm sea
Receiveth drops of rain Lovely at night
Gleams the star dust whirled through immensity :—
So o'er the dome of mind thoughts small and bright
Drift and the heart reflects them like a well :
There fade the once bright myths of heaven and hell!

FURTHER PRAYER

O GIANT Universe of star and sun,
And World whose sea-searched crust
Is teased by merchant lust,
Delved in, built over, road-scarred, fought upon :—
Help me to make my littleness mine own
And not pretend that things surmised are known—
To feel my helplessness as innocence
And, unashamed as is the ladybird,
Live in a tiny cage of vivid sense
And trouble naught for things by distance blurred;
Crush not in me that virtue of the mind,
Which undismayed can find
In very impotence a well of peace
And be least blind absorbed by what it sees
Clearest,
Which, affined unto the soul, familiar is
And dearest.

SILENCE

NO word, no lie, can cross a carven lip;
No thought is quick behind a chiselled brow;
Speech is the cruel flaw in comradeship,
Whose self-bemusing ease daunts like a blow
Though unintended, irrevocable!
For wound, a mere quip dealt, no salve is found
Though poet be bled dry of words to tell
Why it was pointed! how it captured sound!
Charmed by mere phrases, we first glean their sense
When we behold our Helen streaming tears.
Give me dry eyes whose gaze but looks intense!
The dimpled lobes of unreceptive ears!
A statue not a heart! Silence so kind,
It answers love with beauty cleansed of mind.

O where is Silence more alive than dead?
Not where space mutes a myriad furnace suns;
Where time will soon know noise or knew it once,
Corpse-like, she lies on rock- or ocean-bed . . .
Yet as the tender-footed Dawn has sped
From east to west, inaudibly she runs
And, while the bird's insensate hymn she shuns,
Yet lark-like climbs within the ecstatic head—
Thought yearns, and hope, surpassed, watches her rise;
While vision's vault distends the aerial dome,
The cage of dreams becomes a permanent home
To house heart's whole content. Then eloquent eyes
Sing Silence, which, if gazing one have heard,
He thenceforth will disdain the uttered word.

APULEIUS MEDITATES

AN old tale tells how Gorgo's gaze distilled
Horror to petrify men's mobile limbs:
Endymion's moonlit beauty never dims,
Hard-frozen as the fond chaste goddess willed:
Niobe, by her ceaseless weeping chilled,
Drips, a white rock: and when stone Memnon hymns
The dawn, camped travellers whom the desert rims
Rise from the sand they slept on and are thrilled.
I, having wandered through the pines alone,
And felt their hush up from dark ages roll
Like last faint echoes of a lion's roar,
Or storm that ripples out on a smooth shore,
Quaffing their vivid silence with my soul
Have longed to change me then and there to stone.

Ah! what were all my writings worth to that,
Though my discourse be now Rome's choicest food?
If, tranced in such deep wonder as begat
Its own continuance, this body stood
Wearing that sovran spell upon its face
Long as these leagues of pine shall front the sea!
Ah! then fine city souls, who seek the place,
Would meet their mood more strongly felt in me!
Yes, man's best thought yearns on enduring form;
Would seize and hold that swift eluder Time,
Supreme Proteus, and shepherd of the swarm
Of all who were. Like chiselling sublime
My impress on men's minds might thus surpass
That of the weird tale of my 'Golden Ass.'

THE DEEPER DESIRE

FROM noon and afternoon rich blue has bled
Into a sea now dark as the sky is pale;
Down through the cliffs in heat-hushed haste they trail.
Vesture, like flimsy petals, quickly shed,
Each naked girl is soon a bobbing head.
Breeze ruffles, lo! the bay is strewn with sail,
And conscious of the shoreward-tacking male,
They stumble forth; the quietude has fled.
While towels cling, Diana climbs the east;
Their bevy turns half-clad to mutely stare;
The fleet afar is heading for the moon.
Though its approach had to young hearts been boon,
The disappointment more profoundly pleased;
Ocean and solitude had lured them there.

RODERIGO OF BIVAR

CHARACTERS

DON FERDINAND THE KING

DON DIEGO LAYNEZ

DON LOTHARNO GOMEZ

RODERIGO SON TO DIEGO

ALVAR FANEZ FRIEND AND COUSIN OF

RODERIGO AND WARD TO LOTHARNO

RAMON BASTARD BROTHER TO RODER-

IGO AND CHIEF OF DIEGO'S ESCORT

ANOTHER BASTARD SON OF DIEGO'S

MARTIN LEADER OF THE COUNT OF

GOMEZ' ESCORT

FROJAS THE ELDEST SOLDIER IN DIEGO'S

ESCORT

THE BISHOP OF BURGOS

THE ESCORTS OF DIEGO & LOTHARNO

PRIESTS, COURTIER, ATTENDANTS

XIMENA DAUGHTER OF THE COUNT

LOTHARNO

INEZ BASTARD DAUGHTER OF DIEGO

MAIDS IN WAITING

SCENE: BEFORE THE PALACE AT BURGOS

IN OLD CASTILE

TIME: HALF AN HOUR BEFORE NOON:

IN THE EARLY SUMMER, A.D. 1030

A tall stone wall with a heavy gateway in its centre crosses the stage at the back; to either side and masking the wall to a height of some ten or twelve feet are square trellises covered with vines and forming a shelter of considerable depth. In front runs a white roadway which forms right angles with that coming from the courtyard through the gate. Under the trellis, to the left, waits the escort of DON DIEGO, seated on tables and benches, and speaking across to the escort of COUNT LOTHARNO which waits under that on the right. As the curtain rises MARTIN'S voice from within the trellis on the right cries:

Say, Frojas, who thou thinkest should have Najarra
If not our master?

FROJAS This Najarra
Is an ill stretch of land ravaged by Moors
Well-nigh as often as reaped by its Christian farmers;
Yet he who holds it rides
The forehead of Castile
Campeador, Marshal of Spain, her helmet!
MARTIN

Like doorbolt he need be of toughened iron
To hold that black sea out whose furious waves
Bang, bang, and shake him roughly day or night.
Diego is too old—Lotharno now

FROJAS
Are both our lords within on self-same errand?

SECOND VOICE FROM RIGHT
Lotharno will be crossed to find your lord here.
MARTIN

Bah!
His heart is bent to graft upon his stem
Your young slip Roderigo. Having no son
He means his daughter's husband shall be one,
So seeks to share with Laynez his fine lad;
And they may share Najarra the same way.

SECOND VOICE ON THE LEFT

Yea, a poor case for bad blood either hath.

FROJAS

Your count from ours learned all he knows, and we

Hear praised Lotharno as men praise a son.

[The king's two pages RODERIGO of BIVAR and ALVAR FANEZ come sauntering out through the gateway.]

MARTIN That's a fine bird.

RODERIGO [who has an hooded falcon on his wrist]

Martin, thou hast that which would buy my bird.

MARTIN

What? Something on me now?

RODERIGO Yea, on thee now.

MARTIN 'Tis thine whate'er it be.

RODERIGO It is thy beard.

MARTIN

Done! cut it off thyself, close as thou wilt—

Half-flay my chin, we shall remain good friends.

RODERIGO

Ah! should I shave it off 'twere a dead beard;

And for a dead beard I would only give

A dead bird; nathless for a beard alive

'Tis, oh, and there is little I'd not give.

[The escorts laugh.]

ALVAR

Brother, we should return and keep in call;

Thy father will come forth; the king may need us.

RODERIGO

Nay, nay, they spake so fast, they will speak long,

For each did interrupt the other.

ALVAR [insisting] Still . . .

RODERIGO [taking him by the arm]

Come on, I must just see the house, come on!

MARTIN

What wouldst thou with a beard? Thy face is fair.

RODERIGO

[yielding a moment to ALVAR who holds him back]

The man with whom I fence can call me boy;

Antonez calls me boy, for he's a man;

Yet I have learnt the last he has to teach;

Still it contents him crying 'Well done, boy!

Lad, thou wilt do me credit, by St. James!'

Had I a beard, stroking it were enough

To make him quite another man to me.

[He draws ALVAR right forward with a sudden energy as he says the last words and stands centre looking out to the right.]

Thou seest those doves, O Alvar, they are free

To enter at her window morn and eve;

And, is she dumpish with a heavy thought,

Each one of them may on her shoulder 'light

And cooing thrust her heavy thought aside.

ALVAR

Why, thou dost wear her favour,

Thou wilt be her husband!

RODERIGO Yet, when I visit her, I have to sit

Gloomy as is this hawk, distant and cold;

But were my beard grown we should be espoused.

Her father's name is that the Moors now frown at...

ALVAR So was thy father's long.

RODERIGO

My father tells me what once on a time

He did, but when he tries to show me how,

'Ah boy, I am too stiff' he sighs; Lotharno,

While thus my father sighs, is in the field;

From him I might be learning what is done

Instead of hearing 'once upon a time.'

[Breaking off.]

Look look, O Alvar, see! a dove flew down

And crept beneath that awning on the roof.

It is a sign! Ximena, she is there:

It pecks a seed from 'twixt her lips by now.

ALVAR She is a noble child and bears herself
To envy of the stateliest ladies even.

RODERIGO

How well she sits a horse!

ALVAR She spends great pains
On everything that women ought to know.

RODERIGO

How I envy thee lodged beneath that roof
Lotharno's ward! Another dove creeps in!

Look, Alvar, see!

[Exit.]

ALVAR [pulling him on again]

Madman, let's back!

We may be called for any time.

RODERIGO [still gazing up and off] Almost

I could let fly my hawk at one, I could,
To let her by its savage onslaught know,
When that the dove was chased right to her feet,
How hungerly I mope and brood out here.

ALVAR

'Twould scare and set her heart against thee.

RODERIGO

Rather my heart shall bleed than her least dove.

Oh, that Lotharno would adopt me now!

I would be such a son-at-arms to him;

Still at his elbow in the battle . . .

ALVAR Ruy,

We must be going back; the king will call.

RODERIGO

Well, come!

FROJAS. Who gave thee that fine bird?

RODERIGO The king.

MARTIN

Ah! thou art loved by all.

RAMON Haste and get in.

FROJAS Our lord will soon come forth.

MARTIN

It grows so hot,

The King to his siesta will retire.

RAMON

And our old father should not walk at noon.

RODERIGO I am so loath to do what I must do,
I think perchance the sun doth turn my head.

MARTIN True, boy, to see if he can find that beard.

RODERIGO

Jest now, my friends ; for when my beard is grown,
If Moor or Christian, mortal man or devil,
Once mock at it, then may I die for shame.

[He goes in after ALVAR.]

FRÖJAS

Mark that; 'twas spoken like his father's son.
He is the right sort to defend the faith.

MARTIN [to RAMON and his brother]

He puts ye much to shame being so young.

ANOTHER OF THE COUNT'S MEN

He makes it plain ye are but half his brothers.

RAMON Why, what has he done yet?

SECOND BASTARD

'Tis merely those black eyebrows and slow ways.

FROJAS

Be it mount his horse, be it raise his hat, or kneel

Before the king, or kiss a lady's hand,

He is the last, that doing it reproveth

All that before have done whate'er it is.

RAMON Come, let his virtues sleep.

MARTIN

And when his chin sprouts forth, I lay its crop

Shall put to shame all other beards in Spain.

RAMÓN

Here comes our lord and father with your lord.

[DIEGO and LOTHARNO issue from the palace.]

DIEGO [walking ahead a little pompously]

LOTHARNO

Wisdom! and timely wisdom, by our Lady!

DIEGO Though proud to be Campeador, I feel

For thee that hadst a colourable claim,

An expectation even justified

By thy known fitness in thy captainship,

Since thou hast been the marshaller of Spain,

And needs must bear the onslaught of her foes,

Now that old age has weakened my right arm.

LOTHARNO

Even, as thou sayst, mere justice is my claim.

DIEGO Still two cannot both eat the self-same fig;

And it was due, as I am sure thou feel'st,

Unto my services, my long record

Of actions, not to be forgotten yet,

That I should stand for certain years or months

(Full likely will it be but certain months)

Next in the state beneath my lord the king.

The title now to be revived . . .

LOTHARNO [interrupting]

“Revived!” and why?

If not that my successes make Castile,

What during all thy life she has not been,

Secure beyond Sierra as this side.

DIEGO

“Secure, secure!” when now the Moors invade;

Their preparation round Najarra draws.

LOTHARNO

A man past service, how canst thou defend it?

I fear I never shall enjoy the title,

For thou wilt lose the posts attached thereto.

DIEGO I have my sons.

LOTHARNO Thy bastards.

DIEGO

Roderigo.

LOTHARNO A boy.

DIEGO [with a great effort at self-control]

A man, how soon? Discuss no more
That which the king has settled. Ruy has begged
That I should ask thee to adopt him now,
First wed him to thy daughter, then the camp;
Train him for both our sakes: come, Count, consent;
Mine honours will at once be half thine own
As, on my death, they must be wholly thine.

LOTHARNO

'Must be!' I think they should be.

DIEGO

Roderigo

The child of mine old age, is far from ripe,
Yet promises; adopt him, take him with thee
Unto Najarra; I must send thee there.

LOTHARNO

Yea, thou wilt need to send me there, Diego;
Thou dar'st not go thyself: titles and wealth
Thou may'st deprive me of, the trust is mine
By nature's patent that thou dar'st not touch.

DIEGO

For wealth, Lotharno, thou wast born with more
Than I shall ever have.

LOTHARNO

Well, well; but that thou hast deprived me of
Gives thee the confidence now to propose
Thy son to me as husband for my girl.

DIEGO

Not now; these many years we have, as friends,
Consented to each other's hopes in this
And smiled to see their young love lead the way.

LOTHARNO

If this has been so, I have thought of thee
As one incapable of greed or guile;
Thanks; I am wiser now.

DIEGO

I do not envy thee thy wealth, Lotharno;
Why should you grudge me one or two years' wear

Of this high-sounding "Lord Campeador"?
To hear himself hailed by a title second
In Spain to one alone
May please an old man's ear.

LOTHARNO

Ho, ho! The revenues are to be mine;
Only the title, just to soothe his ear!

DIEGO

Thou, being wealthy, hast enough without them.

LOTHARNO

My lord Campeador had need of moneys:
He hath my purse, I must have given it him!

DIEGO

Although our house be not so rich as thine,
My sires have, in their mountains,
Battled as many times
More than thy fathers on their river, as
I with my seventy years have won more fields
Than thou with fifty. Say, how hadst thou learnt
But for Layn Calvo, what was war? Layn Calvo
My father, took thee when a boy, and I
Have led thee, forwarded, counselled, helped thee,
praised thee

From his last hour till when last year this wound
And fever made me know old age was come.

LOTHARNO

I thank thee, though my actions forced thy praise;
For everywhere thou trustedst me, save here,
Where besides honour there was gold: though age
Forbad thee let me have the title yet
We see thou wilt not halve the duties, all
Are mine: is it not so? though I must sell
My river meads for maintenance at thy posts,
While thou shalt with my daughter's dowry buy
Silks for thy mountaineer relations, meadows
Along the banks of rivers for their herds;

And soon thou'lt boast,—yea, I
Foresee a little while and thou wilt boast:—
'Roderigo's with Lotharno; there's no fear;
That boy's his father for the Moors already:
I learn the better half Lotharno's praise
Were paid to him, but that he's young and modest.'
DIEGO

Here our ways part: bid thou thy men precede thee
Toward thy posada; mine shall do the like;
That we with better seemliness may settle
This sore dispute so wretchedly arisen.

LOTHARNO [to his escort which has formed up behind him] Walk on, sirs, towards my lodging.
[Escort exit right.]

DIEGO [to his bastards who head his escort] Boys, move on;
Slowly, for I will overtake ye soon.

RAMON

My lord, the noon is hot, so pray be brief.

DIEGO Fear not, for I am hardened to the sun.

RAMON

Yea, but thou art no longer what thou wast.

DIEGO Enough, begone and leave us!

[Diego's escort exeunt left.]

LOTHARNO Now, Diego,

We are alone, and I may tell thee thou
Hast ta'en advantage of my absences
To wheedle the good king,
And greatly I suspect
Other less honourable means than boasting
Have been employed by thee.

DIEGO

How dar'st thou, and what mean'st thou, Count?

LOTHARNO Thou hast a bastard daughter;
I learn she has been much at court of late.

DIEGO The Infanta loves her.

LOTHARNO The king the Infanta; thy son
My daughter whom he woos to keep her blind,
That I may have no means to know how much
The Infanta's love is cover for the king's.

DIEGO [drawing]
Count, I am a soldier.

LOTHARNO Thou art an old vain man.

DIEGO An old soldier; therefore draw!

LOTHARNO What wilt thou do? look, look!
The wind plays with thy sword.

DIEGO Draw, insolent liar!

LOTHARNO 'Liar?' thou old fox, 'liar?'

Honour forbids me end
Thy palsy-stricken dotage,
But since thou makst it so unreverend
And wilt not leave the road,

Why, I may brush thee on one side; stand back.

[With his own sword still in the scabbard he strikes
DIEGO'S out of his hand, and then striding on him
smites him on the cheek, shoulders him to one side and
strides out on the right. As DIEGO'S sword falls clank-
ing his escort from the left wing give a shout and almost
immediately, following his bastard sons, run on to the
stage, and across in pursuit of the count.]

RAMON [stopping and staying the others]

Stay, brother, stay; we must not now pursue him.

As it now stands the wrong is his—Halt, Frojas!

Come back! [his escort turns and joins him] Frojas

The king will have no broils before his palace!

YOUNGER BASTARD True, best wait.

FROJAS [returning] I think not so.

Though now it be too late; what's done at once

Is timely done, say I.

DIEGO [to RAMON as they all come round him]

Oh, that I had the strength—

The strength which went from me at thy begetting,

Which with thy base clay mingled's not enough—
Is not enough for honour.

[Beating him with the hilt of his sword]

Is there no fire in thy lumpish earth? no flint?

RAMON Alack! what would my lord?

The count's a man too great for me: besides

The king will not have broils before his house:

I pray thee hold thy hand.

DIEGO Alas, I am too weak to even drub thee;

And would age let me follow thee, why, drum thee

Hard as I might, nothing but dust and noise

Should I beat out from thee.

[to the younger bastard, beating him]

And thou, art thou flint? ha!

YOUNGER BASTARD. Spare me, my father!

DIEGO Show fire!

YOUNGER BASTARD Spare me!

DIEGO Bah! Bah!

FROJAS

My lord, 'tis noon: pray now return with us.

DIEGO

Nay, get thee gone; go all of you; get home.

RAMON

The heat is over-great, my lord; come thou.

DIEGO

I will not; get thee gone, thou lump of shame.

[Exeunt Bastards with escort to the left.]

DIEGO

[retiring and sitting on a bench beneath the trellis]

O heftless sword, an old man's honour, who

Shall wield thee? Useless for defence, yet keen

To cut its owner, is honour without strength.

Cruel as is the sun at noon, so cruel

Is the full-blooded man,

The capable proud man;

His youth forgot, his age not felt as near,

He wreaks his spite or scorn and has his will.
Can I go home? Can I
Sit down to eat? Or hope for sleep at night?
Or look upon the faces I have loved,
Whose eyes must see here unrevengèd burn
The stamp of an indignity so vile?
Can I look into the eyes that read these marks
Printed upon the pallor of mine age?
How shall I speak with those, who speak with me,
Who hitherto had honour from their friend,
Yet now can have but shame?

[he bows his head and weeps into his hands.]

RODERIGO [coming out through the palace gateway, while ALVAR FANEZ, who at first accompanies him, disappears by a narrow door to the left in the thickness of the archway]

How blue the sky is! Alvar, get my cloak.
Now is that hour, Alvar, when the sun
Aids love and bids all other men seek sleep—
Sleep which no lover needs. Now every bird,
The wind itself, horse, mule and loud-voiced drover,
Are silent that love's whisper may be heard.—
Make haste!

Ximena at the window on the court
Lies near the plane-tree, in whose boughs I climb
While thou dost sleep beneath; she loves to hear
What I have done and all I mean to do,
For as the bough sways oft it seems a horse
And makes me speak of things as they were real—
Of fights I ne'er have seen as though I saw them:—
Canst thou not find those cloaks?

ALVAR [returning into the gateway with two white cloaks]

Yes, here they are, but thine was on the floor.

RODERIGO

[as they come forward wrapping their cloaks round

them, while the gate of the palace closes behind them
'Tis soiled, but never mind;
I'll say it was in battle; I can think it . . .

DIEGO

Who on green shoots would lean when in his hand
The knotted sapling broke? Misery will,
Misery and despair.

RODERIGO [approaching him in anxiety]

Father, what . . .

DIEGO [striking him] Oh, beggarly resource
To seek there, where, one lacked all right to hope
Help might be found.

RODERIGO Father, have done; 'twere best!

Or else it had been better for us both
If neither thou nor I had seen this hour;

[capturing DIEGO'S wrist]

Stay thine hand at once; for ill-advised
Thou raisedst it; yea, for wert thou any other,
Between us words had been already useless;
And if thou strike again,

I fear that even a father's name will fail
To stay the power which shakes me.

DIEGO Son of my soul, thy rage appeases me:
Thy fiery indignation is my balm;
Bid thy companion go

That I may speak with thee; thou, my true son,
Wilt feel my wrong as thine, my true-born son.

RODERIGO Alvar!

ALVAR I go.

[Exit on the right.]

RODERIGO Wrong? Who
Has wronged us? What his name?
The nature of his deed?

By so much as I am not now a man
Was I thy son too late,
Or there had been none rash enough to wrong thee.

DIEGO

Thou truth of my last years: thy heart's engaged . . .

RODERIGO [impatiently]

To serve thy vengeance on our enemies.

DIEGO [continuing]

Thine expectation fills the time to come . . .

RODERIGO

But cannot fill this moment with his name.

DIEGO

Nay, listen, boy, thou wear'st a lover's badge.

RODERIGO Well?

DIEGO

Thine heart's engaged, thine expectation's dear . . .

RODERIGO Well?

DIEGO Forgive me that I doubt thee.

RODERIGO Father, speak!

DIEGO It is her father, Ruy; Lotharno's hand

Branded this here; feel it how hot it burns.

RODERIGO [stands silent, then slowly tears off the
favour and throws it down and sets his foot on it.]

I have no sword.

DIEGO Here is Mudarra's.

RODERIGO [seizes it and then looks round] Where?

DIEGO He has gone home to his posada.

RODERIGO Yes.

But where? oh, where to meet him? Go thou home;

It is full noon and the torrential sun

Pours pitiless on thine age. Oh leave me! leave!

DIEGO Never again sit I at table, till

Mine honour is avenged; never endure

My servant's wonder, whispers, silence, looks.

RODERIGO

It must and shall be here—and now it must!

Stay, take this sword back; I will after Alvar

And tell him that the king sends for his lord:

The count will come. [He runs out.]

DIEGO [picking up the soiled favour out of the dirt and dusting it] It costs him dear, poor lad.

[hiding it in his bosom]

For me thou shalt be priceless.—

Nothing is living like this boy of mine!

O Lady of Heaven, keep him in thy care!

His enemies' keen skill confounds my hopes,

My fears are cruel . . .

RODERIGO [returning]

I think that Alvar guessed, yet he is true

And said he'd tell the count . . .

The gate is shut.

DIEGO

Lotharno, should he see it, might turn back.

RODERIGO [runs to the gate and knocks at the shutter, which is opened]

Haste, open wide the gate; the count returns;

He has important news to bring the king.

[He comes forward once more while the gates slowly open; DIEGO hands him the sword and retires within the trellis; then RODERIGO steps behind its nearest screen. LOTHARNO enters right, XIMENA following catches him by the sleeve.]

LOTHARNO [turning] Back, girl!

XIMENA Father, remember, if it is the Moors,
Thy promise not to take the field without
Betrothing us and belting sword on Ruy.

LOTHARNO

I forget nothing; home at once! and bid

My escort haste and wait out here for me.

[XIMENA looks doubtfully at him, then seizes his hand, kisses it and so runs out. As LOTHARNO is about to pass in at the gate RODERIGO steps in front of him.]

LOTHARNO [surprised] Ruy?

RODERIGO [half dancing round him]

The men of Leon hold it no fine thing
To strike an old man ; the Castilian warrior
Dreams not that it becomes him to insult
One higher placed than he, respected more ;
No,
Nor shalt thou longer deem it proper and safe
To vent thy surplus fury on a man
Whose white hair honours him ; for thou shalt learn
My father was begotten of Layn Calvo,
And those descended thus brook no insult,
For theirs are shields well-blazoned.
LOTHARNO Hold ! Enough !

RODERIGO
'Enough !' it has not been enough for thee
To have said thy say and exercised thy tongue ;
Thy hand must tingle with an injury.

LOTHARNO
Peace, boy ! I can acknowledge thee excused
By my too hasty act.

RODERIGO 'Too hasty !' then
Make reparation now, ask thou for pardon,
As publicly as thou didst strike my father
Before as many witnessing eyes,—and I
Draw not this sword which else I mean to draw.

LOTHARNO
I cannot that—but I will do as good,
And do what shall tie up the loosest tongues ;
'Thou lov'st my daughter, thou shalt be my son,
I will adopt thee, Ruy . . .

RODERIGO 'Shalt be' thy son !
But I am not thy blood,
Or like thee in dishonour !
No, I am like Layn Calvo, I take after
Diego Laynez, Castilians I resemble,—
Men of Leon, men of Burgos, men of Bivar,
And nothing kin to cowards that dare strike

The white-haired man they envy for his deeds.

LOTHARNO

Hush, lad! thy rage is noble, but too rash:

Thou dost not face the second man in Spain;

Nay, Spain's best warrior bids thee have a care.

RODERIGO

He is no Spaniard, whose disloyal hand

Contemns his liege's honour and his own.

LOTHARNO

Ruy, I beseech thee cool thy rage; bethink thee,

How I can halve thee as I would a quail;

There can be nought of honour 'twixt us twain.

RODERIGO [drawing]

Nay, there is nought of honour shared with thee;

Those who hold with thee share dishonour now.

LOTHARNO

Thou art too bitter, boy; my heart aches for thee;

Put up, put up that sword!

RODERIGO

It is Mudarra's,

And understands revenge, and being drawn

Will not go home till it have felt warm blood

Run in its groove and splash from off its edge.

LOTHARNO [drawing and defending himself]

Have done, good God! Ruy, Ruy, oh hear me speak!

Stir me not, lad, or evil will befall thee!

RODERIGO

Nay, evil has befallen me, now waits

On thee and is keen-edged.

[They fence fiercely; some of LOTHARNO'S escort arrive running from the posada, but DIEGO LAYNEZ steps forward and waves them back.]

DIEGO

This is a fair fight, gentlemen, keep distance.

ALVAR They are not matched.

MARTIN

They are not matched, and yet the odds are mocked,

So hard the youngster drives our lord the count.

ANOTHER OF THE COUNT'S MEN

They're both in earnest now ; just look, see that !

MARTIN

The Count Lotharno bleeds ; our master bleeds !

ALVAR Let them be stopped !

DIEGO

Bah ! 'tis nothing, a mere scratch. Stand back.

[RODERIGO drives LO'THARNO right against the trellis on the left, and he falls under it ; RODERIGO stoops over him and in another moment reappears holding up the count's head. The count's escort uttering exclamations of horror, separate, some returning with ALVAR FANEZ off by the right to the posada, others entering the palace, and a few remaining stand aloof and eye DIEGO and his son askance.]

THE ESCORT [separating]

Help, help ! The count Lotharno's slain ! Help, help !

Rouse the king. Let all the house of Gomez arm !

Gomez to arms, help, woe ! Alas !

RODERIGO

Look here, my father ; now, look there, behold,

For there lie hands that are no longer hands :

The hand that struck thee is a hand no more.

DIEGO I weep, my son, I weep but not for him ;

Though 'tis his death that causes me to weep.

RODERIGO

Nay, see, this tongue is now no tongue to talk ;

Inert as in dead wasp its venom'd spike.

DIEGO I weep, it is too much, I can but weep.

RODERIGO

Nay, nay, rejoice, for there's a heart that shall

Never again rejoice, nor feel scorn more.

DIEGO It cannot be ; thou art too young and little.

RODERIGO

He stood so huge a tree mere men seemed weeds ;

Now sprawls a load of dung to fatten earth
For no more prized crop than grave-yard nettles.

DIEGO

This should be dreamt; I marvel that I dream not;
This is his head? Is this Lotharno's face?

[taking the head from Ruy]

Why, I can see him in the battle now,
Hewing his way; he holds them far in flight;
He will return anon, and speak of thee;
Over the fire by night we spake of thee,
And his Ximena—of 'the boy' 'the girl'
As though there were no other boys and girls
In Spain; and I do love him, when he says,
'The boy' and see he loves me when I say
'The girl' . . .

Oh, hide this head, my son,
Lest it should turn me into stone forever,
Like that Medusa's head, and my heart split
Ere I have thanked thee for so great a joy!
[He holds the head towards RODERIGO, who makes
no response.]

What ails thee? has it turned thee into stone?
Ah! Ruy, ah Ruy! what, art thou hurt, my boy?

[RODERIGO shakes his head]

Oh, I have killed thee! what was that I said?
'Ximena?' 'tis her name, and stabs again;
That I should utter it!

Accursed be my tongue,
The dreamy babbling tongue of an old man:
There, there: I'll hide this head and comfort thee.

[He takes the head back to the body.]

RODERIGO [as DIEGO returns to him]

Oh father, I am well; but say no more.

[DIEGO stands holding his son's hand while LO-
THARNO'S escort and friends troop in from the right
and a crowd wells forth from the palace. There are cries

“Make way, make way, my lord the king will come.”

“Room for my lord the king.”]

DIEGO [drawing RODERIGO whose eyes have been fastened in the direction from whence XIMENA is expected towards the left]

She comes.

[Suddenly she appears on the right, a little in front of ALVAR FANEZ, who has hold of her left hand as though he would keep her back.]

XIMENA

Speechless with knowledge of evil that I must learn
Alvar has brought me here, white-faced, and now
From the verge of some terrible moment holds me back.
What do you crowd round there?

My father? I seek my father!

[With a cry she breaks from ALVAR and runs forward: the count's friends make room for her where they have placed his body on a litter in the centre of the stage, and RODERIGO gives a groan. The cries from the palace grow loud again. “The king! The king! Room! Room!” and DON FERDINAND appears at the back with a canopy carried over his head; among the crowd of courtiers, etc., who have come forth, there is a silence.]

XIMENA

[who has knelt beside her father and thrown her arms over him looks up and in a wild voice cries:]

My father is dead!

O Lady of Heaven,

Thou mighty comfort of women, he is dead . . .

He! He!

Who loved me from long ago,

Who fondled my hair with his hand,

For whom I loved to be good,

Oh he, my father, he is dead—oh vengeance!

Who, who hath slain him? Who hath orphaned me?—

O ye, who mutely stand and grieve for this,
Not of the beautiful Lady Mary only,
Not in my prayer alone, ask I to know,
Not only of the mother of God, but of ye—
All of ye liegemen of the house of Gomez,
Vassals of my father,—of thee O King,—
And, Ruy, of thee . . .

Is that blood his that slew my father, Ruy?
Has that red blood that drips from off that sword
Avenged my father's death?

RODERIGO [with a groan] No.

XIMENA Ah!

Stand not like that to drip,
Drip with my blood, before my eyes; I know it!
This is thy wooing, Ruy; ha, ha, ha, ha!
I shall go mad, I shall go mad; I see him
Red with my father's blood,
Roderigo of Bivar.—

My lord the King . . .

DON FERDINAND My child.

XIMENA

See, see him, that was never pleased with words
Although they pleased me: always promised action—
Deeds, deeds, deeds—is this thy deed to win me?
Thou dost woo well.

RODERIGO Ximena!

XIMENA

Thy boast was that thou wouldst achieve some deed
To prove thy manhood; Lo! thou art a man;
Thou hast a sword; now canst thou wed a wife.—
Behold, my lord the King!
That is my father's blood which makes him red:
Vengeance, my lord the King!
Vengeance on Roderigo, vengeance
On Diego Laynez' son!
Let him die!

DON FERDINAND

My child, I must enquire into this.

XIMENA

‘Enquire into this?’—this is his deed; his deed
And undenied; his proud deed undenied.
Didst know my father? see, his head is severed . . .
Oh, oh, oh!

[She sinks down sobbing on her father’s breast.]

DIEGO

Sire,

The count Lotharno Gomez struck me here;
His disappointment knew no kind of bounds;
He put reproaches on me, jeered, and when
We were alone, worked up to insult; last,
Scorning my palsied sword, beating it down,
Printed his scorpion fingers here and left me,
Me an old man, his senior and his chief,
Before thy palace gates to weep and groan.
My boy conceiving of it proved a man.

DON FERDINAND

‘A man?’

XIMENA

A murderer.

DIEGO

A noble man,

The more in contrast to his bastard brothers,
Cowards and worthless, who had witnessed all.
He, he, my Ruy,
Devised an instant vengeance all of honour,
Met his redoubtable foe and in fair fight,
Unaided, with Mudarra’s sword, won back
The brightness of our fame.

XIMENA

Justice, my lord the King; an orphan cries!

DON FERDINAND

Diego, I have heard thee, and my soul
Longed to embrace thy son:
But here I saw Lotharno lying dead;
When I had run and kissed him if another

Had lain here, here I saw Lotharno lying,
And his Ximena whose long piteous hair
Trails in the dust.—Oh rise, my daughter, now.

[He raises her.]

Henceforth thou art my daughter: fear for nothing.

DIEGO Look at this.

'Tis nothing, yet it means for me,—Ximena,
And for thee means too, or shall soon mean this,—
That honour at all costs is life's law for
The son I trust in, for the man whom thou
Shalt life-long trust in, if it so please heaven.

DON FERDINAND What is it, Laynez?

DIEGO It is her favour, is this dusty silk—
Betokens how she owned his love did please her.

XIMENA I hate the day I gave it him, I hate
To think how light my heart felt, how secure.

DIEGO

'Tis but galled honour drives thee to this hatred;
So honour forced him when 'twas off and stamped on,
Though easier had it been to him, I know,
To pluck his eye forth, cast it on the road,
Than tear this ribbon off and tread it down.
And I believe, thy heart would sooner plough
Thy fair face with thy nails, than thus malign
The beauty of thy love and loyal youth.

XIMENA

How brave it feels to say such things to me!

DIEGO

Why, it were only human in a heart
That longed to kiss the lad who'd shown such valour.

DON FERDINAND

Yes, Laynez, I had kissed thy son indeed,
For this great proof of honour, proof of valour;
Ximena too had longed to kiss her lover,
If other than her father here lay dead.
But here lies dead my marshaller, my right arm,

And there, around Najarra, the Moors gather.
Should private quarrel so bereave a kingdom?
Shouldst thou not in thine anger have bethought thee
How he was needed, and awaited justice
From my true sentence who had proved myself
So bent to give thee honour as I had done?
This is a fault which in the present juncture
May well be called a crime :
See that thou hold Najarra,
Thou and thy son, or fear the event may force me
To visit this upon ye for a crime.

XIMENA My lord, nay, do me right !
These tears are not the first I shed to-day ;
For he has filled my mind with apprehensions
This long time since, such deeds were near his heart.
I woke this morning from a dream wet-eyed,
He, he had caused those tears, that causes these ;
For sitting in my chamber, so I dreamed,
I from the window saw him fly his hawk ;—
Ah ! at my doves ; and one the hawk did strike,
Plunged with its cruel rider home to me,
And hardly in my lap was it released,
Who felt dark hawk wings flap about my face,
And then a moment after, lo ! I saw
My skirt was messed with feathers and with blood ;
Those stains stood out, it was my white silk skirt ;
But these on this dark brown are hardly seen ;
My dove shed those that frightened me from sleep,
But these scare no one, these break not thy sleep,
Although my father shed his life for these.
O King, no longer sleep, no longer dream,
For justice fills the waking hours of kings.

DON FERDINAND

My child, I do not sleep but watch for all :
Our best defence is gone, in thy dear father ;
Diego and his son, perchance, rank next :

Besides, thy love for Ruy
Would make thee hate me soon,
Even if now thy grief and anger overwhelm it.

XIMENA 'If now, if now' ?

DON FERDINAND

My child, I do not doubt thy grief and wrath :
They're honest grief and wrath, but time can change
What no king e'er could mould, the human heart.

XIMENA

Justice, my lord ! these words reproach my soul :
There lies my father dead ; his boastful foe
Stands here and keeps that wet sword in my sight ;
My eyes are filled with blood, I see him red,
And while he bears his head shall never see
Him as I saw him yesterday ; his head
Against my father's head ! 'tis simple justice !

DIEGO She is delirious with her anger, sire,
And her heart does not speak like this wild mood.

XIMENA

My 'heart does not speak !' how does my heart speak ?

DON FERDINAND

My child, thy father wronged Ruy's father first ;
To ask, as though that wrong had never been,
Ruy's head for thy dear father's goes beyond
The strictest justice, goes beyond it far.

XIMENA A very little thing had been enough !

I know it who have heard him hope and sigh
To be a man and to have slain his man :
Oft he has frightened me, as maidens like
That handsome youths should frighten them : my lord,
It had become his passion to draw sword
And a mere nothing was enough excuse :
He did not wait to weigh his father's wrong ;
Or ask how much excuse my father had.

DON FERDINAND

Why, yes, Diego, say what vexed the count ;

He surely had strange provocation ere
He could be heated to such dire excess.

DIEGO

My lord, his disappointment made him mad;
He looked upon Najarra as his right.
The title of Campeador he deemed
Could fit none else: this made a bitter mouth.
And when I spoke, to soothe him, of my death
So surely near, then of my son and of
His daughter, he, not soothed at all, flung out
In wildest accusations, charging me
With thy corruption by my Inez' means,
She was my bait he said

I drew my sword, thine honour and mine own
Both had been outraged by his petulance:
He jeered and struck the blade from my weak hold
Then brushed me from his path with the rough hand
That left its stinging print upon my cheek:
This was the little thing that was enough!

DON FERDINAND

Was any by to witness this dispute?

INEZ [who has been standing in the crowd close behind the king]

Alas! Alas! That I was basely born,
That my false life might be the cause of this!

DON FERDINAND

Hush, Inez, hush. Be silent, girl, for shame!

XIMENA

Nay, let all speak who justify my father.

DON FERDINAND [vexed]

Was any by to witness this dispute?

[A silence]

Speak ye, of Gomez, here; can ye rebut
As false aught of this charge against your lord?

MARTIN

For so much as we heard, the lord of Bivar

Reports the truth ; but we heard nought of what
Touched on thine honour or his daughter's, sire.

DON FERDINAND

Was this fight fair in which the count was slain?

MARTIN

They fought fair, sire ; although they were not matched.

DON FERDINAND

Not matched, indeed ; the issue doth astound me.

XIMENA

Oh, laud him for it downright ! yea, and take
My last hope from me ; for I full well see
That not in Spain shall I, now, find a champion
To challenge forth my father's murderer
And in the lists win what thou wilt not give,
Justice for me, and vengeance on my foe.

[turning to Alvar]

Wilt thou be champion, Alvar, for thy lord?

ALVAR Ruy is my friend ; the brother of my vow.

XIMENA

Yea, and this makes him ever dearer thine—
Makes him the minion of Castile, although
He slew in private quarrel that brave man
Who'd won your battles for you twenty years.

DON FERDINAND

Nay, think, Ximena, it were far from just
To cut that handsome head from Ruy's young shoul-
Yea, and I deem in time thou mayest forgive, [ders ;
And honour youth and valiant comeliness.

XIMENA

I'll honour none but those the light may search
And find nought hidden which they feared to show :
Since what my father said has been proved true,
Since they with their dishonour had outbid
His true desert ; since Inez . . .

DON FERDINAND Say no more
Or thou wilt find that thou hast said too much.

XIMENA

I do but ask for justice and know not
What honour or forgiveness they can claim
Who pay for titles as she says they paid.

DIEGO 'They paid!' Who paid? . . .

DON FERDINAND

[angrily interposing and addressing Ximena]
To call mere vengeance justice flouts the law:
Thy youth runs headlong, maddened by thy grief,
But thou must learn of time and sager heads.

XIMENA [uncovering her father once more]
What art thou then a king for, if thou thinkest
To teach mine eyes forget such sights as this?
Why are thy meals served on a clean white cloth—
Why is that awning held above thy head
If thou wilt not defend the weak and orphaned
On whom a need for vengeance has been thrust?
Though they have weak arms, skirt-encumbered knees,
And hearts and eyes such as all women rue,
They must have enemies,
For they must love their friends.

DON FERDINAND

My child, we all are with thee in thy love:
But could those who most suffer sit to judge,
Vengeance would soon be seen usurping justice.

XIMENA

Alas! I loved my father; and his praise
Has been as chief to me as the sun's light
Unto the flowers, while his gentleness
Was mine alone, all of it, to no other
Ever revealed: for since my mother's death
He was a stern man save to me alone:
Then, where should such as I, bereft of him,
Seek power and will to do his memory right?
If God set not a crowned king in the land,
Who if he shall deserve his royal name—

Deserve to eat his meals off fine white cloth
And to be waited on by noble youths,
Or choose his lemans from their bastard sisters . . .

DON FERDINAND

Silence, child ! I have vowed to care for thee,
But seek no more by taunts to outrage me ;
For this thou askest Justice cannot give ;
A second evil never rights the first.

XIMENA

Alas ! thou art a king then all in vain,
If Justice cannot grant my just demand.

[turning to RODERIGO]

Thou, thou, ferocious murderer . . .

Thou, thou,

That still art dripping there, strike with that sword,
All bloody as it is and hardly cold,

Into my bosom strike ; no need to pause,

For that I am a woman ;

All that thou needest think

Is that Ximena Gomez doth demand

Vengeance upon thy head, and hath detected

Thine and thy father's and thy sister's shame !

O little traitor, I demand thy death ;

For thou hast slain the bravest of the brave,

Who loved my virtues more than thou my face,

And since I was a little girl had taught

Me honour and fair thoughts ; before the world

I brave thee and dishonour thee to make thee

Plunge that sword here, and give the death I ask

At thy hand, Ruy ! Roderigo, at thy hands !

RODERIGO

I go ; and shall insult thine eyes no more,

Though better were I pleased to be laid there,

And that thy father should be standing here ;

Even though less cruel words were said to him,

Though thou wert shedding far less bitter tears.

ALVAR

Whoever else may share in Inez' shame,
Of one thing I am certain, Ruy shares not:
He knew not of it! It was strictly hid;
And I his fellow knew no more than he.—
Say, Inez, if it be not truth I speak.

INEZ Oh, all is true!

DIEGO

Oh, that it were as true I dreamed not of it;
But that was the worst poison in his words,
I guessed they did not far fail of their aim.

RODERIGO

Ha, father, was that title bought like this?

DIEGO No, son,

For though the king might long to think it paid for,
I knew nought, nor dared he to hint so much.
But oh, I feared although I still could hope!

ALVAR Ximena, Ruy goes to Najarra now,
To fight with swarming multitudes of Moors,
Black skins and crammed with faithless cruelty.
Speak to him, sweet Ximena, some kind word;
Look, he is pale and wretched unto death;
Say him one farewell of the days gone by;
Or if not, like a memory of those days

Shining through this black hour as eyes may shine
Through the black lawn that veils a lady's face.

XIMENA What I have said, that was I right to say.

ALVAR

His heart is breaking, thou mayest rue thy words.

RODERIGO

Ah, not her words, nor even those tears first struck
My heart; my heart was stricken dumb before
Mударra's sword was ever poised by me,—
When for our wounded honour's sake, my hand
Dragged off thy favour, trod it in the dust.

[to the crowd]

Yet what is honour worth without a hope?
Stripped bare of expectation, man may well
Throw honour to his country for a banner
To flaunt abroad or smarten churches with.
Are any men what they would have us think them?
Because my father guessed but knew not, I
Have killed the man I next to him respected.
He were alive had he had choler's rein
As perfectly in hand as his war horse's;
Neither proved himself what he thought he was.
[to Ximena]

Thine honour doth demand thy vehemence
As mine demanded what I hopeless did.
We give our youth to feed this hope old men
Nurse in their hearts—that life can burgeon beauty
Worth more than life itself,—a specklessness
That soiled hearts know and worship but own not.
[to Diego] Now, father, to Najarra; now to where
Thirst for my blood the Moors.

DIEGO

Nay, stay, Ruy, stay, and let me plead with her.—
My child, my fair child, let thine anger go;
Thy heart is utter woe at all thou sayest:
When thou shalt see him lordly, coming home,
With heads of Moorish kings tied to his saddle,
And proud Castile is giddy with his name,
Then shalt thou yield thy noble heart to joy
And welcome home a living pride for one
That cherished but the dead. If he doth well,
Think what a noble husband he shall make!
And that he may do well, beside his mettle
He nothing needeth but a hope of thee;
Then tell him, if he doth defeat the Moors
Thou wilt forgive and honour him again:
Be thou a daughter of Castile, henceforth,
Whose king has vowed to be thy father; then

Smile thou upon the young hope of Castile.

XIMENA

Ah! these words hurt me where I am most hurt

And if ye madden me I must speak mad.

DON FERDINAND

Dear child, we cannot be forever hurt;

Soon I forgave thy recent biting words,

Though dashed at first to have my foible known.

The manège of long years hath taught me turn

Quick as life's tightening bridle gives the hint:

Believe me, child, we should not still be hurt,

Nor grieved world-without-end, for nature heals us;

In youth she heals us fast; refuse not then

Unto thy future years

What in their hands may prove

A potent medicine for many a woe;

Wreak not thy present spite on days unborn.

XIMENA

Though thou hast done things that no man deems wise,

Yet wise it seems to thee to speak like this,

And in my heart is something prompts me listen,

Even in my heart,—and unto thee, Diego.

Yet here my father, there his murderer:

This dead man taught me, shaped my mind and heart;

He planted in me this young stem of honour

That grows so, I can scarcely give it room:

Perchance I am poor soil for plant so fair,

Perchance it must at last wither and die

As now I come to think the more past must:

Yet I must hope the best for my poor honour,

Must tend and foster it.

The price of all things in the world is this;

Honour gives value to the life we lead,

Has given a meaning to the crown thou bearest,

Has put an accent on my speech and words

And lent unto my gesture any grace

That makes it other than a serving wench's:
For honour means worthy of trust, proclaims
How that within and that without are one—
May be depended on to act together.
Praises have been truth's loyal echo, love
Been privileged, drawn forth and bound by honour;
And all affections happy in the pale
It set for safety round my tasks and pastimes;
I, then, obey it to my last of strength,
And since I now scarce trust our lord the King
[turning to the BISHOP of BURGOS, who with a
bevy of priests has made his way through the crowd
from the right and now stands at the foot of the bier,
while XIMENA stands at the head, she continues]
O holy father, unto thee I turn;
Make me thy Church's child and give me leave
In Mary's service to live honourably,
Though wholly hidden from the world, the same
In honour as he made me who lies here.

BISHOP

My daughter, all the Church pretends to give
Is love, and all she asks is childlike trust.

ALVAR

Ximena, there's a ghost cries in thy heart:
Tell Ruy the truth, not the most fitting falsehoods.

XIMENA

To exorcise that ghost I turn to Holy Church.

RODERIGO I go to die then.

XIMENA Here in my heart thou art already dead,—
Slaying my father thou didst kill thyself:
If my heart break as well for lover dead
As father dead, why, what is that to thee?

RODERIGO

Thou lovest me.

XIMENA. He whom I loved is dead.

[RODERIGO turns and exit left.]

DIEGO Girl, canst thou let him leave thee thus?
XIMENA He has his father's counsel, I lack mine;
The Church that fathers me approves my course.

BISHOP

My daughter, Holy Church approves her child.

DIEGO His blood upon your heads if he must die.

[Exit left.]

DON FERDINAND

Thy father was too proud, and so art thou.

Yet though thou hast offended me, I leave

Those doors unlatched which, though my wrath would
close them,

Yield access to my heart that still is thine

Shouldst thou repent thee for my kindness scorned.

[Exit, followed by those from the palace.]

ALVAR Ximena.

XIMENA Get thee gone.

ALVAR

When was it? Yesterday?

That thou on tip-toe went'st with dancing eyes?

What was it brimmed thee over then with glee?

A love for days to come to flout unblamed?

To be forgotten, murdered, smothered down,

That had not helped thee prove thy best thoughts thine,

Which had not crowned thine honour?

XIMENA Alvar, say no more I . . .

ALVAR Ximena, oh, be true!

Be kind, and be thyself.

XIMENA

[Kneeling and hiding her face on her father's breast]

Get thee gone, it is too cruel, get thee gone;

Leave me with my poor father, leave me, leave me!

ALVAR Ximena, send for me and I will come,

Ready with speed to post unto Najarra.

[He waits a moment, and receiving no answer turns to
the Count's escort.] Come, sirs, let us return.

[Exit, followed by LOTHARNO'S people right.]

XIMENA Oh, my lord, O father mine,
Does thy fair spirit listen to thy child?

Hast thou from Jesus' palace heard me throw
All that I had in all the world away?—

O Lady of Heaven, Mary, comfort me,
And make me know my father heard his child.

[She again bursts into weeping.]

BISHOP

Be calmer, daughter: let them bear this bier
Into the shade and shelter of the church;
And follow thou with us from out the sun
Whose rigour on thine unprotected head
Has poured this hour, and surely to thy tears
And passion adds a fever of his own.

[He pauses for a reply; then touching her]

Come, daughter, thou must now obey the Church
Whom thou hast chosen to replace thy sire.

XIMENA

Alas, I shall go mad; what dost thou mean,
Thou base-born priest? wert thou a gallant man
Thou wouldst not now remember what I said;
And hardly could I say it in my pain:
I took from Ruy as I was bound all hope;
But if in spite of that

What shall I say?

Why need I in my sorrow speak to thee?
Remember nothing of what now has passed!
It well may be that I shall take the veil
If Ruy is killed: indeed, I see no hope
But I shall take the veil, who might have had
A life so happy

but hold thou thy peace!

Lead me into the church, for I must pray,
But prate not thou to me of what I said;
In pain like mine—why—anything is said.

[Following the bier which the priests take up, and supported by the BISHOP, she moves towards the right, followed by her women, as the CURTAIN descends.]

THE LITTLE SCHOOL.
TO
DAN AND RIETTE
WITHOUT PREJUDICE
TO
THE ORIGINAL INSCRIPTION
TO
SYBIL PYE
MISTRESS
OF
THE LITTLE SCHOOL.
WHO FIRST WISHED THE POEMS
WRITTEN FOR
AND MADE THEM TO LIVE FOR
CHILDREN

BEAUTIFUL MEALS

HOW nice it is to eat!
All creatures love it so
That they who first did spread,
Ere breaking bread,
A cloth like level snow,
Were right, I know.

And they were wise and sweet
Who, glad that meats taste good,
Used speech in an arch style,
And oft would smile
To raise the cheerful mood,
While at their food.

And those who first, so neat,
Placed fork and knife quite straight,
The glass on the right hand;
And all, as planned,
Each day set round the plate,—
Be their praise great!

For then, their hearts being light,
They plucked hedge-posies bright—
Flowers who, their scent being sweet,
Give nose and eye a treat:
'Twas they, my heart can tell,
Not eating fast but well,
Who wove the spell
Which finds me every day,
And makes each meal-time gay;
I know 'twas they.

TO COOK

LIKE mown hay tossed in a high wind,—
As a calf careers round a cow,—
Like bags that with lavender I lined
In the linen presses to stow,—
So buoyant my glee,—
So joyous I bound and so free,—
So sweet and delicious the smell,
And the taste even so sweet as well,
That you, that you, that you give to me
With your plum puddings, dear old cook:
I'll have your praise sung in a book!

MERRY WIND

THE sun makes dust on the highways :
The wind pokes fun at the geese ;
With feathers blown all sideways
In walking they find no ease.

Let them spread wings, in it rushes,
As though to bulge out a sail ;
Away they're blown on the bushes
To wreck like yawls in a gale.

WIND'S WORK

KATE rose up early as fresh as a lark,
Almost in time to see vanish the dark;
Jack rather later, bouncing from bed,
Saw fade on the dawn's cheek the last flush of red:
Yet who knows
When the wind rose?

Kate went to watch the new lambs at their play
And stroke the white calf born yesterday;
Jack sought the woods where trees grow tall
As who would learn to swarm them all:
Yet who knows
Where the wind goes?

Kate has sown candy-tuft, lupins and peas,
Carnations, forget-me-not and heart's-ease;
Jack has sown cherry-pie, marigold,
Love-that-lies-bleeding and snap-dragons bold;
But who knows
What the wind sows?

Kate knows a thing or two useful at home,
Darns like a fairy, and churns like a gnome;
Jack is a wise man at shaping a stick,
Once he's in the saddle the pony may kick.
But hark to the wind how it blows!
None comes, none goes,
None reaps or mows,
No friends turn foes,
No hedge bears sloes,
And no cock crows,
But the wind knows!

WORDS FOR THE WIND

WITH the waves for hounds,
With the clouds for hawks,
I hunt the fragile ships
And scour the dry-land's dips;
And my hale voice sounds
When a cavern talks.—
Children, hold your petticoats down,
Or with heads in their folds you will sail through the
town.

When I lie on the earth
For leagues flowers shake
With joy; I sit up, and trees
Pulse as my heart decrees;
And new heavens have birth
When I sleep on a lake.—
Children, hold your petticoats down,
Or with heads in their folds you will sail through the
town.

LUBBER BREEZE

THE four sails of the mill
Like stocks stand still;
Their lantern-length is white
On blue more bright.

Unruffled is the mead
Where lambkins feed,
And sheep and cattle browse,
And donkeys drowse.

Never the least breeze will
The wet thumb chill
That the anxious miller lifts,
Till the vane shifts.

The breeze in the great flour-bin
Is snug tucked in;
The lubber, while rats thief,
Laughs in his sleeve.

LEAF-LAND

HIGH, high, high,
In the sky
The tree's great head
Far out-spread
Holds a world for fairies,
Joy for ever varies.

Happier none
Beneath the sun!
They in and out
Till the leaves shout,
Just as hills do after
Children's louder laughter.

As I stare
Right up there,
I can see
Come to me
Down the leafy staircase,
Such a peeping fair face

That I feel
So little real,
Airs might shift,
Yea, and lift
Me where bird-wing fanning
Would be nigh unmanning.

High, high, high,
In the sky,
'Mid the spread
Twigs I'd thread,
Like the little fairies
Where no jot of care is.

THE FAUN

A HOUSEHOLDER is Goathooves;
He dances in his house:
Its pillars are tall timber;
Its rafters, lichened boughs,
Support a thatch of live green leaves;
And dead leaves cake up into mats;
Moss grows him carpets of deep pile.
He has no coats, he has no hats,
Nor wardrobe, nor pantry,
No table, no chair,
Nor bedstead, nor basin,
For he can wash where
The stream runs clear above the stones:
And the best that he owns
Is a heart that warms a true neighbour
For folk in feathers—folk in fur,
But dreads to meet with grown-up men,
Though it have a weakness for some children.

A SONG OF CLEANNESS

SING gladly when you wash, and start
A sweet song when you take your bath :
Clean hands they make a lightsome heart,
And clean feet tread a happy path.

Into the trembling water dip
With soiled and clammy skin,
Soon from the tossing bath to skip
Clean as a new pin.

Life in you, as in a lamb, is
Keen to gambol joyously :
Towel toga and fringed chlamys,
In place of frock and suit, leave free
Limbs as for small Greek and Roman ;
Be you like them then, if no man
Else to-day so wise be found ;
Frolic with grace, and let your voices,
Timed and tuned, avoid mere noises ;
Riot not, but dance and sing :
"If tall trees above the ground
"Grow green in spring,
"Deep, oh deep, their roots have wound
"Groping where no light is found.
"Strike deep, strike deep, like a root ;
"Wisdom, strike deep through the heart !
"Your clean foot wants not for a boot ;
"Clean hands, once joined, need never part."

From laughter rarely cease for long,
Yet never over-loudly laugh ;
Then gaily singing wash ! A song,
Oh, sing one gladly in your bath !

THREE THINGS

THREE things are there made for fun,
And one a frolic breeze is;
See it over wide fields run!
Ha, your hair is down!
Ho, there goes my hat!
And neither meant to tease is:
There's fun in this, there's fun in that;
How useless at the wind to frown!

Three things are there meant for frisks;
And one a field of hay is;
Fill the air with scented whisks!
Ha, you're buried, child!
Ho, where am I now?
All's fun that done in play is;
Both this and that come right somehow
Though all a field with joy go wild.

Three things are there planned for romps
And one a dancing sea is;
When they forget their foaming pomps,
Ha, what rogues the waves are!
Ho, I'm off my feet!
The sea-folk know what glee is;
They all have tempers sweet,
Are laughs loud as caves are,
Are rompers hard to beat.
Sea-children let us be to-day
And roll and gambol in the spray,
Till little merlads and little mermaids
Leave their under-sea lawns and their sea-weed glades
And come to join our play;
They happy as we, we happy as they
The livelong day.

THE MOUSE IN THE BEECHES

A LITTLE brown wood-mouse
His ample fur-cloak dons;
Ties too his comforter,
Wool white as down of swans;
And as he left the house,
To see his tail was there
He turned his head;
Then off he sped,
To look if beech nuts were
Silver or red.

THE SQUIRREL

O SQUIRREL, would I were as you!
As nimble on a bough, as quick
To listen,—re-assured, to flick
My tail and bound across and through
The leafy coverts, twig-supported,
'Mid rafters of some great tree's roof
Where sun soaks through the rain-drop proof,
And heavy body never sported.

Winged birds are there, and you, the red
Small playful scurrier up the bark,
Whose home is in some hollow dark
But soft and warm as any bed.
Have after you, you wingless flitter!
Race me into the topmost boughs!
What need have we for floors? a house
Without a plank for us were fitter!

Teach me to swarm and climb and be
A sailor such as those who vie
—On mast and rigging dizzy high—
With you in nimbleness and glee!
For though a loud wind toss these branches
A ship is handled worse by storms:
Then to his work the sailor warms;
From spar to rope he daring launches.

NEW CLOTHES

O ALL ye meadows fair,
And soft sunshiny banks,
Where daisies without number—where
Pale cowslips range their comely ranks,
And buttercups with prouder yellow
Think each himself the finest fellow:
Since I put on new clothes to-day,
Call, call me forth to you;
For I would bear myself the way
Your trimmest blossoms do.

Ye nobly peopled woods,
And stately throngèd dells!
Moods of grand oak and beech-tree—moods
Of lofty pines whose music swells
To the hale wind's repeated pleasure,
When all their tops keep time and measure—
Are moods that I would learn to share;
Then call me forth, ye trees;
Teach me grave bows and curtseys fair
As those ye give the breeze.

SHOES AND STOCKINGS OFF

BARE feet, bare feet,
Lovers of the dew;
Pleased by the wet moss greatly,
Pleased by the shell-strewn shore,
Pleased by the lawn grass too
Yet
More by a golden floor.

Bare feet, bare feet,
Every day bless you!
Walk near the fountains stately,
Walk in the pebbled stream,
Walk 'neath the calm waves blue
And
Dream there a mermaid's dream.

Oh, fare sweet, my bare feet
Like lovers two and two!
Lead me for ever where there
Of shoes is known no need:
For I have ne'er met care there
Where I with you might speed;
Lead me because I love you,
Love you, my sweet bare feet,—
Then still I'll sing above you
And you shall still fare sweet.

LULLABY I

LAUGH, laugh,
Laugh gently though,—
For leaves do so,
When the great boughs, to and fro,
Cradle the birds on the tops of the trees;
Gently they laugh for the love of these.

Sleep, sleep,
Sleep lightly though,—
For birds do so,
Rocked by great boughs to and fro;
With wind in their feathers, their dreams have wings
And they visit the gardens of fabulous kings.

LULLABY II

STRIPPED thee when thou hast and girt
Thy clean night-shirt,
Leap into thy soft snug bed;
Lay down thy head;
Sleep, and in thy white cot be
A picture for the stars to see.

Cling not to the game that's dead;
Be glad instead,
After all thy falls and frowns,
That silence drowns
All that any star might see
To make such clear light sad for thee.

Sleep, sleep;
Down, down,
Through silence good and deep,
Down, down;
Sink as through a well, each trace
Or of spite, of sulk or frown,
Dying out from thy still face
Till asleep thou dreaming lie,—
A sight to charm the moon on high
And hold her longer in the sky.

PICTURE FOLK

LITTLE rogues in pictures,
Rogues with nothing on,
Naked, nimble, elfin,
Quickly come and gone;
Whether ye have wings or no
Easy as a thought you go
Through the air and over sea,
Or in and round majestic tree
Circle like some giddy bee.

Little rogues in pictures,
How did you come there,
Naked, nimble, elfin,
Blithe as sunny air?
Whether now you swim or fly
Swallow-like about the sky,
Is it all the same to you
That I cannot, rustling through
Green boughs upward, reach the blue?

Little rogues in pictures,
Lived I where you play,
Freed from clothes and elfin,
Airy, light and gay,
Though an hundred friends I had,
I should want one who was clad
In clothes and walked in boots, I should;
And, in summer field or wood,
I should swoop down where he passed
And hold and kiss him very fast,
For fear that he should be afraid
Before of him my friend were made
And we upon the earth had played.

WINGS

THAT man who wishes not for wings
Must be the slave of care;
For birds that have them move so well
And softly through the air:
They venture far into the sky,
If not so far as thoughts or angels fly.

Feather from under feather springs,
All open like a fan;
Our eyes upon their beauty dwell,
And marvel at the plan
By which things made for use so rare
Are powerful and delicate and fair.

When callow brood doth rest
Against a downy heaving breast,
Beneath the shadow of two wings,
None seem so close at home as they
Nor is love felt a cosier way;
Their mother is their home! Lark sings,
And lark may sing; but not so take
The heart by storm as hen can take
When, hawk in the sky,
She is brave for her fledglings' sake!
Swallow soars, and swallow may soar on high
To the top of the sky;
The eagle is strong, the ostrich fleet;
Let them glory in prowess. Ere
They learned to conquer air and space
With ease, velocity and grace,
Lark, swallow, eagle, ostrich were
Dependent on devoted care:
Each once was snugly stowed away,
Yea, like a smooth stone there each lay
Egg speckled, bluish, white or grey!

HANDS

SING, for with hands,
One thumb and four fingers apiece,
They built the temples of Egypt and Greece!
Sing, for in many lands
Are things of use and beauty seen,
That without hands had never been—
Without skilled hands!

White hands, deft hands,
No lily is more lovely ; no,
Nor can the swan more graces show
Than lady's arm commands!—
O strength as of a giant's grip!
O firmness meet to steer a ship!
O swart male hands!

Frank hands, free hands,—
When shall my little ones grow great
And clasp such huge ones for their mate?
Who thinks, who understands,
How hands of soldiers and of kings,
And all those by princesses waved,
Were once a baby's hands, and craved
For jangling toys and shining things?

DAYS AND NIGHTS

LIKE a king from a sunrise-land
In fair ship sailing,
With banners salt winds expand
And pennons trailing;
With wealth untold and a mind unknown,
And a power to love and make friends of his own,
And a power to leave those he likes not alone,
Each new day comes to me,—
Like king from far east sailing
Over the sea.

In a barge with golden trappings
For queen prepared,
And, against the cold, rich wrappings
And furs deep-haired,
To lands afar, by a force unguessed,
Where the face reveals what hides in the breast,
And by doubt of another no heart is distressed,
Some nights have carried me,
Like queen that homeward fared
Over the sea.

O heart, be true and strong,
That worth make thee each day's good friend;
Then thou the hours of dark shalt spend
Out there, where is no wrong.

HOME RULE

OH, to be glad as a bird!
Never to be put out!
Not to be ruffled by look or word,
But both to meet like the bluest day
That charms the world in May!

Oh, to live on and on!
Travel the world about,
As cloud sails or sails a swan,
When skies are blue and waters bright
Bearing serene delight!

Bearing a smile like the sun,
Break on to-day and to-morrow,
Soothing the eyes of sorrow,
And giving a cause for none!
This is to be a queen or a king,
Not of countries but hearts;
This is to conquer everything
At home, not foreign parts.

NURSERY ENACTMENTS

BEFORE their nursery fire one day
Upon two hassocks sat
Willy and Nance, half tired of play;
Between them purred the cat.

“You said this afternoon ‘I would
‘We’d seen a fairy,’ Nance;
‘I’ve read of fairies; most were good
‘And loved to play and dance.

“Yet now it is a long while since
“Fairies were often seen;
“Oh, that I then had been a prince,
“And you had been a queen!

“Then, kindlier spoken of, the fairies
“Were not too rarely seen;
“By night they churned butter in dairies
“Or swept the farm-house clean.

“A bowl of milk for Lob was set,
“His beans Hobgoblin earned:
“And one was drained, the other eat
“Before the day returned.

“Then through the woodland glades by night
“Would Queen Titania stray
“With Oberon, and the moonlight
“No fairer was than they.

“While little elves danced in their rings
“Upon the dewy grass;
“Ah, freshlier, greener, herbage springs
“Where feet so happy pass!

“A world within a world was theirs,
“A house within a house;
“One slumbering while the other stirs,
“One bold, one shy as mouse.

“A prince no other palace had,
“A queen no other bower
“Than a farm-house with roses clad,
“And jasmine porch in flower.

“The queen sate in the doorway then,
“Adorned with joy and health;
“The prince then laboured with his men,
“More proud of skill than wealth:

“The queen shelled peas as she sate there,
“Or russet pippins pared;
“Wise travellers speak to those so fair,
“And thus their meals were shared;

“For such a prince was glad to find
“For guest at supper time,
“A man who had improved his mind
“In many a far-off clime.”

The cat purred on; then Nance, at last
Unto her brother said,
While on her grave face fire-light cast
Its fervent glow of red,

“O Willy, when you spoke of how
“The fairies worked by night,
“And in the morning swept and neat
“Each farm-house would its inmates greet,
“I thought the same thing happens now;
“Our house is thus set right.

“For often when we go to bed
“The room’s in such a mess,
“That I am quite rejoiced to see
“The bedrooms prim and orderly;
“They make me on my toe-tips tread
“In awe of tidiness.

“And in the morning, why, we leave
“The beds turned inside out;
“Tis dreadful after bolster-fights!
“But think, are there more dear delights
“Than from this room our eyes receive?
“It often makes you shout

“To see a nice new fire ablaze,
“The chairs in order set,
“The floors swept clean, the breakfast laid
“And all as by a fairy made,
“When sun shines, to enchant our gaze,
“Or comfort, when it’s wet.
“‘A house within a house’ you said,
“When,—me this thought amazes!—
“Why, that is just as true to-day!
“Only, I think, a luckier way
“Had come into somebody’s head
“Of singing servants’ praises!

“How nice to call them fairies, Will,
“And be as pleased to see
“In any place about the house
“Them, as a fairy shy as mouse!
“It would go far my days to fill
“With queenliness and glee!”

“A game to last forever, Nance!

“You’ve hit upon it; come and dance!
“Queen Nance’s house, the sprucely kept
“Shall nightly be by fairies swept—
“Shy elves as rarely seen
“By daylight, as are dusky mice,
“Of any save prince William’s eyes
“And those of Nance the queen!”

(While they are dancing the cat walks into the next room.)

THE HOUSE WE BUILT

LIST! winding ways lead through our wood,
Winding ways that dip and rise;
For over hills the trees have grown,
Over hills whose dells are mazed
With thickets of such close resort,
For precincts to a fairy court
Those thickets seemed designed, and oh!
Precincts they are, they are! not for the fairies though!

Yea, busy builders wove the boughs,
Busy builders planted stakes;
While active hands tore heather up
Hands active roofed the weather out.
Of no concern there—dreams are all
Ye crowds who call us children, call
Our great concern but romps and games!
Two rooms! a house built far from voice that warns or
blames!

Oh, it were hard to find
A place so to our mind!
Should one grown up grow wise
He'd leave yon crowd of spies,
Flit from before their eyes,
Glide swift from tree to tree,
Come hither and grow free,
Have royal fun—
Have done
With dullness, even as we.

THE YOUNG CORN IN CHORUS

ALL we, the young corn, stalwart stand
In millions upright side by side,
And countless acres of the land
In orderly close chorus hide,
Shouting: "Gold, of his largess,
"And health he discharges
"Both far and wide!"

Though all the world were brimmed with gold
And valleys with health had over-run,
Who could command his hand to hold,
Contest the giving of the sun?
Hail him; vigour for growing
He cometh bestowing
On each weak one!

The winds, with showers on their backs,
His servants, lounge by distant seas;
And far-seen summits of their packs
Heave up when shifted for their ease,—
Wearied, long there attending
Lest heat of his sending
Cloy those he would please.

LIFE

MY life feels like a mouse
In some strange giant's house;
Or like a single fly
In a Saharan sky:
Small part in life have I,
Yet of one sort with it whole,
Is my small soul.

Bird-life makes glad the trees,
And tree-life throngs our hill,
But life would fill
An airier hive with souls for bees—
More room than, far from shore,
A night-sky coops above wide seas:
Though that were packed, outside were more.

My eyes drink up the swallow's flight:
Swift, smooth and light,
Their joy is free.
The sound that heaves
Like music up from a mile of leaves,
Is glory to me.

Then, there are waters gurgling along,
And ladies together singing a song,
Sounds that, entering my head,
Move more than can be said.
Oh! and by how much life, thought of, should
Thrill more than flight, song, stream or wood!

THE WILD CHERRY

THOUGH one white bunch would crown the tree
A million blossoms laugh at me,—
Each one exquisite and neat;
Each with grace to rule a heaven;
Lavish of joy as is the sun
Of light and heat!
Who could love them every one?
To whom has such a heart been given?

A CHILD MUSES

JOY steals through me if I sleek
Damask petals of a rose
Softer than a fairy's cheek;
While for gladness my hand goes
Through fringes of floss-silk, and guesses
How slowly mermaids comb their tresses.

"O thou rosy finger-tip,
"Touch me!" pleads the looking-glass:
"Then muse how palms of feet must trip
"O'er polished sapphire floors, where pass
"The seraphs holding hands and singing
"Songs that through their hearts are ringing."

How these hands of mine would love,
When, both scooped up, they form a nest,
If down some comfortable dove
Fluttered, and, cooing, there should rest,
While quivered through my arms such blisses
As sleeper feels whom vision kisses!

TONGUES

TONGUES there are that naught can say;
Tongues there are that run away;
Tongues that lure the fairies nigher;
Tongues that set the world on fire;
Bad's the tongue that rules his master;
Such lead ever to disaster.

Early make your tongue obey;
Always know what it will say;
Bid it say what you think best,
Hold it in for all the rest:
Fairies ban all tittle-tattle,
Wise men shun the tongues that rattle.

Neither dumbness nor yet noise
Makes a paradise of life;
Nor wise nor foolish can rejoice
Where a bitter tongue is rife;
But friendly tongues with gentle speech,
Morning, evening, or at noon,
Or 'neath the tender silent moon,
Will oftentimes help their owners reach
Bliss that feels like fairyland,
Or where the angels, hand in hand
Pace the gardens of delight
Or coast round clouds at evening bright.

EYES

WHAT pretty words he ought to know
Whose heart is bent on praising eyes!
He must work on till midnight though,
And ere the sun be keen to rise,
Before his words will flow,
His thoughts be wise.

What pen of pens, in a fine hand,
Should copy clear praise due to eyes!
Some feather dropped on spice island—
Quill shed by bird of paradise!
Ink stirred by magic wand
That golden dries!

What clean brave pages in what book
Would he trace over, praising eyes!
And writing, what an earnest look!
Then reading, how his heart would prize
That world of pains he took!
The cost in sighs!

For no king ever owned a gem
Was worth the half of his two eyes,
Nor princess bore the diadem;
So none to name their value tries:
Yet love that blindeth them
Pays the whole price.

This then is why a mother says
She'd for her baby give her eyes:
Nor could you write them finer praise,
Though you before the sun should rise;
Words could no freelier flow,
Thought be more wise.

MY FRIEND

I HAVE a friend, and he is gay
As ever in the month of May
Could be a true blue holiday.
He takes a pleasure,
No matter what the game may be,
As great as those who sail a sea
And are the first to sail there; he
Makes much of leisure.

In school he pores above his book
As, lonely in a woodland nook,
Queen fairy on herself might look
In pool reflected.
And, never taken by surprise,
He answers questions with his eyes
Before his ready tongue replies
Clear and collected.

In battles long ago have fought
Brave men, and I have often thought,
He with the best his best had wrought;
For none does better:
Once all an afternoon he plied
The sculls and rowed against the tide,
Though she to sea had drifted wide,
If he had let her.

We others gave up, wearied out:
But, though his arms ached, he was stout,
And none who stayed a battle's rout
Could have kept cooler.
So, not to waste his friendship, I
To be like him resolve to try,
And when like me the world thinks, why,
We'll make him ruler.

ALONE

WHY was I tempted to-day
From my friends to glide away,
To find this tranquil place
The friendlier, since no risk is run
Of meeting here with a friend's face?

Why should I need to be alone?
Deep in a wood to meet with one
Still to myself unknown?
Who is she that I am and yet
Have nowhere ever met?
Shall I find in her a friend
Whose comradeship will never end?—
Or someone whom I cannot love,
With whom it is my fate to leave
The company of those I love
And near her feel unloved and grieve
Because she knows me far too well?
Ah! there is nothing you can tell
Yourself save things she knew before,
Who of your faults has kept the score!
What lures me deeper through this wood?
What ails me thus probe solitude?
Lo, all the leaves and their shadows stir!
Hidden? Behind me? Near? Somewhere
(Stop, o heart! Stop!) she breathes. . . . will wait
Till your flurry of wild surmises abate.

Peace grows; her thought dovetails with mine
And wears a dear attentive face.
Like sister-twins, we leave this place,
In step, arms laced to keep me true
To the kindness I feel, in things I do.

DAVID AND GOLIATH

WITH half his arm in running water
David groped for rounded pebbles;
Kneeling by the brook, he sought there
Till he found five that were good:
O that I had been by then,
When at last he upright stood,
Choicest of the sons of men!
While round his feet in rippling trebles
Water crooned across the pebbles.

He was young and fair to see
In his shepherd's dress;
His spirit and his limbs felt free,
Quit then of their late distress
When he, caged in king Saul's casque and gaunt war
suit,
Had said, "I cannot go in these,
Since their use I have not tested"—would not do it
Even a king to please.

He left that clear and purling water;
Only one of his five stones
Did he use, yet mighty slaughter
On the Philistines ensued:
O that I had heard the shout,
When that stone had been proved good—
Done its work beyond a doubt!
While ended felled Goliath's groans,
And no need for further stones.

It is always good to be
Where long-sighed-for things
Are done with that felicity
Every hero with him brings,—

When he must be up and doing, steps forth lightly,
Nor needs fear's casque and mail to don;
Sure, he who acteth simply, bravely, rightly,
Hath trustier armour on.

DAVID AND JONATHAN

IT was not easier to be brave
When Jonathan to David gave
A prince's for a shepherd's kiss,
And golden bracelets, chains and rings,
And garments such as sons of kings
Wore then to walk where honour is.

It was not easier to be true
And wear as he, a prince, must do,—
Meeting blank wonder or a jeer—
A shepherd's smock, and count it bliss
Merely because that smock was his—
David's, his friend, whose love cost dear.

It was not easier to be brave
And sleep in lonely den or cave
Where lions prowl, where scorpions crawl,
When, hunted by his friend's mad father,
David risked his own life rather
Than take the life of sleeping Saul.

It was not easier to be true,
When he once more found Saul, and knew
That he might kill him and go free—
To save the man who sought to slay him,
To take his spear and cruse, then pray him
Be friends, calling himself a flea!

Not without effort are friends made;
Not without suffering are they kept:
Though this is like a friend indeed,
To suffer plaintless and not heed
Though pain have reached him through his friend:
But when such troubles find an end,

And joy is his, then, then to need
His friend, is like a friend indeed.

Oh, often find the time to muse
About the gentle, brave, and good!
There is no better way to choose
When nothing waits that should be done:
Yea, let the mind take flight and run
Like a 'scaped deer that seeks the wood,
To stories of the brave and good!

A DREAM

THE body, when a man is dead,
Like empty dress lies on the bed;
But that, which in his heart said "I,"
Travels away a butterfly;
Called Psyche in the old Greek tales,
This wonder-pinioned creature sails
From trees in bloom to open spaces,
Where, amid herbs, glow petalled faces.
Now listen; in a dream, last night,
My psyche through my mouth takes flight
And soon planes down through warm blue, where
Her grand resplendent fellows fare
On, swallow-tailed or peacock-eyed,
Wings whose colours glint and glide,
And shame the wardrobe of a king
For fairy cut and tailoring.
I cruise on raptly like proud ship,
Then over a pool-mirror dip
And see, not heart-contenting wings,
But glazed rubbed smeary whale-bone things!
Then I remembered yesterday
And how my temper spoiled our play.—
Poor scarecrow, to my chrysalid
I flew straight back, crawled in and hid.

WATER

“TELL me what hath water done?”

“From highest mountains it hath run

“And found a way to distant seas,

“And all the time flowed on with ease,

“Welcome as those who love to please.”

“Say, what else hath water done?”

“It hath soared up toward the sun

“And piled cloud-ranges in the air,

“Shaped city, ship or white steed there—

“Forms that with happiest dreams compare.”

“What hath water done beside?”

“Cleansed the hands we fain would hide,

“Made soiled faces fit to kiss;

“And water’s crowning work it is

“When tear-washed hearts recapture bliss.”

JOSEPH

TO the chamber where he slept
Went Joseph the first time he wept;
Because he saw them and had heard
His father lived—saw Benjamin,
His little brother; not a word
Could he venture to them then.

The second time he bade the crowd
Leave the room, then wept aloud:
“Lo! I am Joseph—be not grieved—
“Your brother whom you sold:
“Yet not by you was I bereaved
“Of all dear things—my father old
“And Benjamin, my brother small
“(Ah, now behold how he is tall!)
“God only took me from him then,
“And God restores me Benjamin.”

So came joy washed bright with tears;
For every day of all those years
Joseph's heart had grown more strong;
Not in vain, he, in the pit,
Strove with terror, grief, and wrong;
Not in vain, drawn up from it,
And sold a slave, sought he to know
How even slaves win love and trust;
And won, and felt his prospects glow;
And lost; yet, losing, knew he must
In prison still begin again,
Though all those pains had proved in vain.
Yea, every time his efforts failed
He rose with stronger heart and wit;
And every time he higher scaled
Till he stood where, for dreaming it

They had first thrown him in the pit.
Yet he to love must change their hate,
Not blaming them; for, though so great,
He knew how hardly right is done
And conquest over weakness won—
Had come so near to failure, he
Could but of his love be free.

Rejoice!
Give the heart's gladness voice,
Encouragement for all he won,
Proving how much may be done
By those who once were weak.
Abound
In effort, courage and success!
Oh, seek
Till all you search for has been found!
Than singing this is better, yes!
Yet songs can hearten too,—
And your voice shall ring true
When you, as he did, do.

MARAUDERS

GLOSSY and black with yellow beak
He tilts his tail in glee—
The little thief who gaily steals
The cherries from our tree,
And, friendless, keeps a sharp look out
For many an enemy,
Then whistles that delightful song
In praise of robbery.

We thrill at stories told of men
Who lived such lawless lives,—
Pirates and savage chiefs and blades
Who, reckless, slew their wives,
Plundered and dared the whole known world—
Our eyes shine as we read:
Bad though they were, our blood is stirred,
For in them will was deed.

Could I so dauntlessly make mine
The graces they were blind to,
Contented as yon blackbird is
I'd cock my head, and find too
That note of clear contagious joy,
Which takes men, rude or polished.—
Could I so frankly chant, my heart's
Wild liveness were abolished.

PLANS FOR A MIDNIGHT PICNIC

INTO the schoolroom rushed Tim, where Margaret,
Mary and Bob

Had their heads bowed over the county survey half an
inch to the mile;

He shouted "It's fixed for to-night! and sandwiches
grow in the kitchen,

"Mother is choosing us fruit in the storeroom, but
Father laughs at us

"And says, we have more need of food for the mind
than the body, and blankly

"Shall stare at the moon without word or idea to bless
the occasion

"Which was to inspire our souls."

"Let us surprise him," cried Bob,
"As we walk on the road,—I have it, Hurrah! The
woods in the dark

"Will tower on either hand, an army command has ar-
rested;

"Silent platoon by platoon, they await a terrible sum-
mons,

"Ready to march through the land and trample the
fields of man's tillage.

"Long, long ago, trees stood where now only corn-
stalks are growing;

"Forest spread over where farms have usurped both
valley and hill;

"Therefore the tall timber ranks stand alert till, at sig-
nal from Justice,

"War is declared on the two-legged, his works aban-
doned to havoc.

"Down shall go factory, mill; wall, fence and paling be
flattened,

"Beech boles crash in through parlours, pine trunks
stamp upon kitchens.

"Bridges will lie broken-backed, where the hundred year oak-tree has thundered,

"Pounding along the high-road, by which so often of old

"His fathers and brothers were dragged, sawn through at the ankle and branchless,

"Cruelly lopped and maimed, and chained to a wood-cutter's trolly,

"Even their roots dug up, wedge-riven, and turned in-to fuel!"

Both girls clapped their hands, and Tim with a "First rate!" continued the fancy:

"Yes, let us think, as we walk past the miles of their numberless muster,

"How vengeance may overtake man, and city and town be beleaguered,

"Wide stretches with mansion and homestead and village rammed-in and down-trodden

"Dismally tell where their squadrons have wheeled, boughs mightily swinging."

But Margaret here interposed with a shake of her long hood of tresses:

"Should we not rather imagine, their patience reproaches us meekly,

"Like those who, though wronged, can love; like sorrowful mothers and nurses,

"Sad elder sisters that stand their full height, and await our repentance,

"Hurt and yet resolute, dignified, holding themselves at a distance,

"Brimmed with unspeakable grief and yet ready to flow with forgiveness?"

Then Mary's raised hand claimed the hearing her voice was too low to make sure of:

"Listen! in walking to-night through the woods, let us ponder neither

"After this fashion or that, but think of them truly and simply,

"As of trees in full-leaf whose life is a plant's by night and by day,

"And passes like absolute slumber, for neither muse they nor dream they;

"Nothing they know of revenge, as little of ruffled affection;

"Though warmth and the breeze unfold their leaves, though the cool still hour

"Bedew and refresh their sun-drowsed tops, they rejoice not as we do.

"Yet ours may be joy in their welfare and we be enthralled in the starlight

"By their majesty, lofty and mute, that finds a way through our being,

"Calming and soothing our hearts; yes, we, in their stead, may be conscious,

"Grieve for their lopping and felling, exult in their verdant expansion."

Here Bob, re-inspired, burst forth, "Yes, that is the thought to take Father!

"Our hearts shall thrill near their stems, where sap is ceaselessly mounting,

"Glad that each is so lordly this June and, though dolefully beggared

"In autumn, it yet will, transfigured at Christmas, look like a tree-angel,

"Dazzling in hoar frost or vested in snow, and awe us with beauty,—

"That each will in April be daintily tipped with soft green, tender

“As down is on duckling new-hatched, or hair on the head of a baby!”

“Hush, here he comes!” called out Tim. “Keep all that for midnight!” and when

Their father had entered the room they were measuring routes on the map,—

Soullessly keen on short-cuts, or on choosing a good place to camp in.

ALPINE HOLIDAYS

IT is not useless to climb hills
Or toil up mountains;
Air there is song-like; the eye thrills;
The near drops under, distance has replaced it.
How sight bathes in those spaces!
Thought with vastness face to face is;
Live, in the fountains,
Water is younger, readier to laugh,
And so worth while to quaff
That, thirst appeased, you sip again to taste it.
Earth has a human throb beneath our feet;
High on a mountain breast
Friendships are born again; we meet
Each other with new zest.

SNOW

THE inexhaustible sky
Has covered the land with flakes;
So blithe is it, clean and new,
You smile as when your spirit wakes
To sudden splendours
Of shaping power, that reveal
Through song, book or statue,
With what a grand man you can feel,—
He who wrote, thought or made it,—
Your fellow, your comrade, because
You enter it fully—
See and know all it was
To him!—Then snowed-under,
Forgotten, effaced,
Lie past failure and blunder!—
All shall be, nay is, replaced
By a new life as candid as snow,
As much of one piece!
Ah! but the whole while you know
In a day, or a week, or a month,
The thaw will set in, and brown earth,
And black trees, and dull cloud
Return—admiration of worth
Give place to those moods disavowed.
Yet be not then cowed,
But remember, recall
How this snow can fall
Autumn, summer and spring—where it fell
Lie as long as in winter as well.

THE TALE OF AN ASS

JOHN, son of thunder, went
For a stroll up through the lanes;
He mused of the robe and throne
That were to repay his pains,
When his master should be king
And he himself a judge;
Which time so tarried, he owed
Each day that deferred it a grudge.

Though he darted God's wrath from his eyes;
Though James was as fiery in speech;
"What handsome lads!" said the crowd,
"It's a pleasure to hear them preach!"
If the poor believed at once
That the rich were wildly astray,
To examine their own hearts' faults
What snail could move slower than they?
And as for the wealthy, great stones
Were as eager as they to think;
So he felt like a shepherd, who
Had filled up his troughs to the brink,
And "Hither, ye thirsty!" had cried,
But whose flock would not gather to drink.

Thus, though the deep lane wound
Among green fields, between gay banks
Loud with the giddy sound
Of grasshopper fiddlers, who waited no thanks,
But played over and over
How they lived in clover,—
This young reformer frowned.

Suddenly, a sharp winding brought him
Right on a little stray ass:
And, in fancy, John had caught him

Before he had plucked the grass,
With which he hoped to lure him near,
Then seize him by a long grey ear.

But the frisky creature led
The apostle no end of a trot,
Till he panted and sighed for breath;
And the only 'ass' he got
Was thrown out at himself for ever
Wasting his time on that vain endeavour.

He wiped the blinding sweat from his eyes;
The creature leaned against a wall,
Like its own shadow, dangle-legged;
A shade it was! no ass at all!
But where and what was that which cast it?
John scarce dared upward glance,
As a voice quite near and laughing,
Said, "Friend, we've had a dance!"

No longer a chafed and self-styled ass,
But humble and docile, John
Stood in his girdled smock, a spirit
Angels might wait upon.
For he beholds a Seraph now,
With jewelled band braced round his paps,
And gemmed band round his brow;
In saffron vest and sandal-straps,
Though fisher-lad-like glow
His naked shins, neck, arms and hands
Clean as the water and brown as the sands.
A nameless one of that host was he,
Who flamed upon the sight
Of shepherds, over the Bethlehem hills
On the first Christmas night.

And he answered John's beseeching
Awed-look, as lad might speak to lad
When neither the one nor the other had
Dreamed that he might go preaching:
"Though reason there is for all things queer,
"It may be hard to find;
"So you shall know how I came here
"In a donkey's form and mind.

"When, singing *Unto men goodwill*
"And on earth peace they had had their fill,
"Our host was star-ward gone
"From the white hill-top, on
"That night when heaven's most-admired
"Was born a baby, Adam's son,
"To mother poor and travel-tired:—
"I, alone, lingered near the flocks
"And hunted in and out the rocks,
"Lest Arab bent on sheep-stealing
"Should find the unguarded fold,
"While its shepherds were all kneeling
"Around the one-hour-old.

"From rock-shadow to rock-shadow
"I glid, shaped like a cloud;
"Then crossed the road, where a lame father
"Limped slow, and sobbed aloud.
"His grief was all to think that he
"Would never, with the others, see
"What made God's choir stoop down to earth,
"And winged the young men's feet,
"And flushed his own heart, that cold night,
"With such a wealth of heat.

"To see him was to pity him
"And wish myself an ass.

“We seraphs never want a thing,
“But straight it comes to pass :
“I trotted back into the road,—
“Which I had crossed a trail
“Of silvery ground-crawling mist,—
“Long-eared with tassel-tail.
“He seized my scruff and led me close
“Beside a boulder stone,
“Climbed to my back, patted my neck,
“And we were quickly gone.

“No need had he to urge or cheer ;
“My heart was in the game,
“I found him but a feather-weight.
“We won the race ; though lame
“He was the first to kneel before
“The babe all longed to see ;
“And I myself was the first ass
“Who dumbly, stolidly
“Stared at that perfect bud of life,
“Which, full-blown, shall set free
“The hearts and thoughts and lips of saints
“Through ages yet to be.

“There, you know why, in pleasant vales,
“On visits to this earth,
“I find a joy that never fails,
“And fill my heart with mirth
“To gallop on a hilly road,
“Where other asses need the goad.”
He vanished, and John murmured there,
As he knelt down to pray :
“To help is nobler than to judge ;
“Kind service is like play ;
“To appear a donkey in men’s eyes
“May sometimes be divinely wise.”

TWILIGHT REVERIE

REMEMBERED in the evening,
After a long happy day,
All my moods of work and play
Fold together like a book,—
Collect, compose as, at a look,
A picture shows you miles of land,
Mountain or camel-travelled sand,—
Or as a crowd which may require,
For all its homes, full half a shire.

Remembered in the evening,
After a long happy day,
All my moods of work or play
Gleam like pool at some sea-side
Left by a far-ebbing tide,—
World you could cover with a gown—
Weed-forests, a pebble town
And shell palace, where tiny, proud,
Invisible royalties,
From pearl-fretted balconies,
Gaze at my face, as it were a pink cloud.

THE ROWERS' CHANT

ROW till the land dip 'neath
The sea from view.
Row till a land peep up,
A home for you.

Row till the mast sing songs
Welcome and sweet,
Row till the waves, outstripped,
Give up, dead beat.

Row till the sea-nymphs rise
To ask you why,
Rowing, you tarry not
To hear them sigh.

Row till the stars grow bright
Like certain eyes.
Row till the noon be high
As hopes you prize.

Row till you harbour in
All longing's port.
Row till you find all things
For which you sought.

DANAË
AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED TO
CHARLES HAZELWOOD SHANNON, R.A.

THE STORY

A daughter was born to Acrisius, king of Argolis, and called Danaë, and taken to the temple of Zeus as the custom would have it done. There those who had brought her, having made an offering, awaited an oracle, when pronouncement was made to this effect: that the son of this child should slay her father. Now Acrisius was no king by nature; no, not so much as a brave man is; he, therefore, thinking to prevent Fate, determined to immure his daughter, and, by the time that she was weaned, had raised a tower of brass, so strong that it might never be broken into, so smooth that it might never be scaled, and so high that his daughter was reared in the top of it beyond the reach of any man. There, then, she grew fair with no attendance save that of a single crone, who, as youthful poets know, like all old women had but one subject to converse upon, namely the scandals of love; now this one had been under such penalties forbidden her, that, as a companion, she was little better than a hen. Danaë's mother was so slightly considered that it is not known whether she died in giving birth to her, or, if not, in what manner she supported the tyranny of her husband. Nevertheless the Will that is Love hated the selfish cowardice of Acrisius and chose the child that she might live immaculate and yet become a happy mother, in order that the blessedness of that state might be made known, as also the nobleness of the issue born out of purity. For this was the mother of that Perseus, whose quoit hurled to an incredible distance, by accident, as had been prophesied, broke open the head of his cruel grandsire; after which just misfortune he slew the monstrous Gorgon and delivered Andromeda from a Sea-Dragon, beside being more beautiful and achieving more heroic actions than are easily borne in mind. Zeus then, the Will that is Love, the Power that is Light, prepared everything, and in due time, laid siege to that tower, assaulted and set it at naught. Thereafter without affright, without loss of innocence, without violence, shame, or any

awkwardness, without the never-to-be-wholly-avoided trifling of courtship, but only once bathed naked and amott in pure sunshine, the virgin conceived and bare a son. Whereupon Acrisius in a very great panic, thinking it a miracle or worse, sent her to sea in an open chest, her baby with her; but Light is over the sea and Love findeth a path across the widest ocean; nor was she ever in danger, but without fear found both haven and home in Seriphos, where she brought up her son as holily as she ought. This is the story "such as youthful poets dream on summer eves by haunted stream," and the poem like such dreams has no fixed order or progress, but begins and begins again, and is broken off rather than ended. May this Danae make happy friends with as innocent a maiden and as blessed a mother in thy mind also, gentle Reader.

DANAË

Still, brilliant with bright brass, the tower derides
The sun's gold shafts; which strike, and on all sides
Like ridicule-lit laughter, spread; and some
In bravery bend back whence they have come,
And try their strength with those that come direct
With first impetuous potency unchecked
From the god's bow. For this the heat is great
O'er all the land of Argolis of late.

*Of the tower's
siege by golden
light and of
Danaë's swoon*

The king, Acrisius, hopes his tower may prove
Impregnable to liquid light and love,
Rolled round it in a golden ocean-tide
Whose ebb is a June night: and so all dried
And dusty have the ways become; the fields
They wind among, with grain a rich soil yields
Should glow, not thus discover to the eye,
Between straws lank and earless, what cracks lie
And lengthen snake-like on the brittle earth.
Light in excess stifles her nursling mirth:
Old Inachus, most like a fevered wretch,
Who on his hot bed scarce hath strength to stretch,
Doth, round stones limping, feebly seaward crawl:
While in the tower-top Danaë small,
Unconscious how a god toward her steals
Across her prison-floor, lies numbed: nor feels
His burning kiss the hand he reaches first;
But swooned amort, with sweat her brow has burst;
While parted lips show teeth like maids in bower,
Where past them no sweet breath hath stirred this hour.

An oracle had Zeus, the king of heaven,
On this Acrisius' fond petition given:
"By the unintending hand of thy new-born
And infant daughter's son shalt thou be torn
From life and power: till he that age attain
When young men take to quoits first, live and reign!"

*Of her father's
folly*

This silly king was filled with hope at once
To outwit Zeus, which proved him but a dunce;
His daughter he from all men straight immured,
And deemed himself from grandsons thus secured.

*Of her body's
growth and its
changing beauty
and of sisterly
love for the re-
flection of that
beauty in her
mirror*

Leaves lap and overlap, and trees; the lily,
Deep-delled and fragile, grows up very stilly:
So silken shade and shawls of varied hue
Hid Danaë who whiter daily grew:
When moulds the potter on his whirling wheel
Dumb clay, a hint of final curves will steal
From clever hands in sapience sure; just so
Quaint querulous suggestions of a flow
Of contour simpler, more capacious, slips
From God's thumb when he moulds a woman's hips.
Her thighs will lengthen faster than they round,
Till their delightful devious line be found.
The heels, too narrow, of the little feet
Will give her steps a wayward wavering sweet.
As when, unpropped, the heavy dahlias stoop,
Her head nods, nods, and even her spirits droop;
For nothing saw she, save her room's few things,
Beside the well-conned window-view; and brings
Each year no increase to her life's thin store
Of sights—the only one not known before,
A larger loveliness, that might be found
By searching the great mirror's polished round:
This had advent so imperceptible
It dwelt unnoticed there; and yet, whimsful,
She loved to view—no soil or levity
In her fresh silent mind—naked and free
Her beauty;—purely, with no least alloy
Of flurrying shame that hindered to enjoy;
Nor vain at all, since she had never seen
Eyes like to those which modest maidens screen.
Themselves from, neither knew that any girls

There were less fair than she, or who wore curls
Less copious or of poorer purple sheen
On lustre-lacking black. Oft would she lean
As through a thunder-rain, while combing it,
Nor then alone before her mirror sit;
For when—cool after washing with well-water,
That up the winding stair nurse daily brought her,—
She gravely sat to musingly commune
With her companion-self a June forenoon,
To see so grave her gentle image brood
Within its round, that pensiveness renewed,
Which, on the wane, bright health had nigh dispersed;
Yet, though in reverie still deep immersed,
To gain a smile's return sometimes she smiled.
So from her nurse's knee she, oft beguiled
When little, by the bright resemblance to
Her young glad life, had tottered towards the new
Espied child, whose fresh rosy limbs resembled
Love's sown in their deep-dimpled mould, that trembled
Within the mirror's glimmering polished deeps,—
Thus at the foot of forest trees there peeps
A sky cress-framed that laughs to recognise
Another blue. And, though she now knew better,
She would not slight her double nor forget her,
But smiled, and half-deception friendly-wise
Lingered, though hands no longer patted pleased
To meet their chubby twins as when she, seized
With love, bunched up her lips to meet the lips
Out-thrust to them; still no experience strips
(Though silver disks may give one the cold shoulder,
And though a dozen years must leave one older)
That veil, with child-dreams broidered, from her head;
Still someway separate existence led
The twin, and not so much more silent, sister
With her up-grown. Not once had she yet missed her,
As slow their earliest dimpled limbs discovered

Most gradual change, and winsome sparseness hovered
Waywardly peeping out till plumpness went :
O'er salient points a certain tightness lent
A peevish pinched appearance ; in sight too
Their shoulder-blades moved looselier ; a new
Sly meagreness thus crept o'er them : like shoots
They sprouted up to statelier growth : as roots
Sent down into dark mould, grew whiter daily.
Strange inner effervescence sparkled gaily
Out through their eyes. Thus taller, taller yet,
Till many a frock that pleased begins to fret,
The skirt too short that had been long enough,
While thin and faded wears the patterned stuff ;
Nay, scarce can she re-picture how, when bright
As first put on, appeared flushed with delight,
Her tip-toe sister, who with pretty grace
Held it out wide within the mirror's face.

*A fond plea for
not leaving
childhood yet*

Can we now turn our crowding thoughts away
From those sweet days?—the heart misgives us, nay!
But linger o'er the lovely ; soon, full soon,
The morning hours lose charm and it is noon.

*Of her compan-
ionship with re-
flections in her
mirror and in the
brazen walls
and how it was
not enough*

Though every week her clothes are borne away
Soiled, crumpled, limp ; wait seven days and they
Come back clean, smooth and neatly folded : so
Slumber each night renews her. Thus time's flow
Seems nothing, till she find two sandals small
Far back within a cupboard on the wall,
And hardly can believe that they were hers ;
Then laughs for how the mirror-sister stares
At tiny sandals there. Thus lived they on
Most silent happy twins, almost alone
And yet not quite ; for deep through polished walls,
Inhabiting adjacent dimmer halls,
That gleamed like vague perspectives 'neath a lake

Mid water-lily stems, and half-awake
Dusky or silvered fish, what ghost? What shade
Of hazier gaze? What dreamier shyer maid?
Or was it ghosts? (vague as her sister fades
When her breath dims the mirror) ghosts of maids?
Friends? or one magic gliding friend that there
Walks as they walk, more distant combs her hair?
The mirror held who most a sister seemed
Yet sometimes of this other had she dreamed,
Who still was seen through that part of the wall
Whither her gaze was turned—wimpled a shawl,
Or laced a slipper, dim in gold haze drowned:
But if she puzzled, lo! the mirror frowned;
So she must smile to cheer her thoughtless friend
And thus unsolved her meditations end.
Nor might she muse, when from the appointed place,
New budded breasts, dissimulating grace
As March flakes feign the snowdrop's calm, showed forms
Hazy like mushrooms when the night-time warms,
That globe and gleam, yet leave the stars in doubt
If on the dewy slopes they shift about.
For, did she muse, her sister first grew still,
Then, as she harder thought, frowned and looked ill;
So she for pity could no long time dwell
Upon these mysteries: yet all went well,
Nor did she find an urgency for thought
To mark events; solutions came unsought,
Or were not needed: yet she had a need
Unhelped, though change thus patiently proceed,
And she be never long what she hath been.
Yea, even a mere white-mouse caged and seen
Through close-strung wires, will writhe its sleek length high,
And hold with pinky paws, and seem to sigh
While, sniffing tainted air, it seeks a vent
From prison; and then scurries back, as bent
On finding in the oft-searched farther end

Some small escape; and, since its birth there penned,
 Yet lives on, never losing childish hope
 Somehow eventually its sense may cope
 With most perplexing life-imprisonment:
 Thus Danaë, with hopeful discontent,
 Led to and fro her white shape in her life's
 Wall-hampered home; and still this useless strife's
 Fatigue can barely disappoint a mind
 So scantily versed in freedom, or unblind
 To fate's fell force, eyes closed by charity
 To real and might-be sights' disparity.

*Again fondness
 pleads for not
 yet leaving
 childhood*

'Tis time; come, turn these loitering thoughts away
 From those child years. Lack we the heart still?—'Yea
 Yet linger o'er the lovely; soon, full soon,
 The morning hours lose charm and it is noon.'

*Of how in spite
 of lack of en-
 sample and her
 seclusion she yet
 came to be of
 most gracious
 disposition*

Of manners and accomplishments, you deem,
 So lonely maid had little. This may seem
 Quite certain; yet, e'en as her tender flesh
 That readily took print or blenched, so fresh
 The quiet gods had kept her growing mind;
 Leaves wet with dew in lettuce-hearts confined
 Are not more dainty or more clear of hue:
 Though never to fib tempted, she was true.
 Two shapely feet taught her how best to walk;
 To please a sensitive ear she trained her talk;
 Full oft to sit upright made her feel good
 And raised her languor to a better mood.
 Concerned to judge of objects which were best,
 Watchful for intuition, she would test
 Her least decision by renewed appeals
 To quick experience; how it is she feels,
 Spacing her coral necklace beads with sprigs
 Of hen-and-chicken fern, and how with twigs
 Of box, whose leaves resemble beetle-wings:

Thus, tracing beauty through a thousand things,
Her features had assumed an earnest mien,
Which would have well become enthronèd queen.
Yet, as a breeze with honeysuckle, she
Had madcap moments, and her locks would free
To dance and twine; this freedom so became them
She oft indulged it and was loth to tame them;
Yet when she did, thoroughly combed, she bound them
With ribbons or in strings of pearls enwound them,
Plaited them now, and now would have them crimple,
Or snood them up completely in a wimple:
For each success suggested new successes,
Till she was taught distinction by her tresses.
At meals, in ordinance for seemliness,
Her practice like perfection did express!
Disgust, watching her nurse's common ways,
Had taught her what to avoid, and native grace
Had chosen fine-cut morsels, moderate sips,
And placed a napkin by to wipe her lips:
"Thank you" and "please" she said, till nurse exclaimed
That matched with her a goddess might be shamed!
Which praise gave her great pleasure; in reward
A kiss to the old crone she would accord;
For she had learned to win her judges over.
Where is it women will not this discover?
Her little terra-cotta dolls to see
Home to their cupboard, taught her courtesy;
For they were brittle, easily upset,
As much so as folk for politeness met.
To lay for meals and put away her toys
Thus exercised her tact and furnished joys:
While moths that entered during the warm nights
Were novelties, excitements and delights.
Their mealy wings, full early, she respected,
And with both hands behind her them inspected,
Enjoying golds and browns and marblings rich

In shading finer than the finest stitch
 That silk embroidery can hope for; she
 Their delicate curved feathered antennæ
 Admired, and supposed them an head-dress.
 Their jewelled eyes she knew at once, Oh yes!
 Though some bore eyes upon their pinions painted,
 With such deceiving wiles she was acquainted.
 The bronze-green rose-bug and the lady-bird
 Paid visits; calls of butterflies occurred
 More rarely; sparrows could be lured with crumbs,
 And even doves; while wasps would light on plums.
 The characters of all she soon divined;
 And from the first, these last distressed her mind;
 For cruelty seemed such a proof of thought,
 She deemed this insect wiser than she ought,
 And hated it far more than there was need;
 To women partial judgments Zeus decreed.

*A third time
 fondness pleads
 for lingering
 over childhood*

Come, turn, though late, these too fond thoughts away
 From her full days! Still, still, Love pleadeth, 'nay!
 But linger o'er the lovely: soon, full soon,
 The morning hours lose charm and it is noon!'

*Of her bed with
 the morning and
 evening joys
 related thereto*

How long it took before her bed was made!
 Such precious cares expended, overpaid
 In self-approval sweet themselves! It stood,
 A scaffold house of slender painted wood,
 Secluded like a shrine far in the room
 Where curtains through the day made hallowed gloom.
 Deep (many a dove gave every bosom feather)
 The mattress hung on straps of pliant leather,
 Which, through each other plaited, joined the frame;
 Soft were the pillows; over all there came
 A coverlet which made sheets gleam so white,
 Heaven's lining, outward turned, less dazzling bright
 Appears to those who, at the height of noon,

Loll back on scented heather late in June
And sound, beyond blue, blue and blue beyond.
Blue drunk into sea sleeping like a pond
Beneath such heavens, could scarcely match that quilt,
Where the profusion of the night was spilt!
Numberless stars, yea, stars of every size!
Thus friendly night and day did fraternize;
Only the jealous sun, he was not there;
He with a silver crowd would nothing share,
Neither a spangled cloth nor day's long void,
Through which he rides in pomp, sole, sad and cloyed.
Yet o'er her navel, when she lay supine,
In its first quarter meek the moon did shine:
This served for warmth; but oh! above her head,
Hung the real glory of that lovely bed,
Which she, half-dreaming, studied many a morn
With infant happiness, Sleep's newly-born.
Fanwise did leafy boughs depth o'er depth rise,
Like upward caves or under-sea green skies;
In whose ærial vaults the small sweet-voiced
And never-wearied choristers rejoiced,
And some had nests, and some were building them,
And all made silence singing! Folk condemn
Long hours spent in this delicious way;
Leave them the busy middle of the day!
Watch Danaë though, as pensive she undressed
Like nun retiring from a world unblessed
To dear herself and one god's service vowed.
When naked, over her limp weeds she bowed,
As Hypnos bends above a cold sad corse
To extricate the soul some strange remorse
For things disparaged once, keeps clinging there,
Touched home too late; so bowed she and such care
She took to extricate all knots and fold
Her pretty sheddings neatly; then, half cold,
Whipped in between the sheets, and, wakened half,

Drew on her simple nightdress with a laugh
 To think how lazy she in this was proved :
 But out she got that all its folds be smoothed.
 Chanting to Artemis her evening hymn
 With raised hands, looking skyward, stood a slim
 And pallid upright, like a style of stone,
 Or like the moon-lit path on waters lone.
 Then, gliding back to bed, she made a nest
 Remembering all the games that pleased her best
 What time she, younger, raised up tent or cave
 And head thrust downward did the darkness brave.
 So, smiling like a mother o'er such thought,
 Sank, as leaf floats down through a temple court,
 Down through Sleep's vasty halls of marble black—
 Like star-ray through dark sea, sank down and back.

*Of the brazen
 tower, the siege
 of the golden
 light, and more of
 that sweet com-
 radeship with
 the reflected
 image of herself
 that continues
 even into her
 swoon*

But O return, return from those sweet days !
 Behold the theme of our fond wandering praise,
 Her father's should-be dearest, from his court
 Exiled, that lonely lies, swooned and amort !
 Where brilliant with bright brass the tower derides
 The sun's gold shafts ; which strike and on all sides,
 Like ridicule-lit laughter, spread ; while some
 In bravery bend back whence they have come,
 And try their strength with those that come direct,
 With first impetuous mastery unchecked
 From the god's bow ! There, there ! as orchid may,
 To make an oak's top mossy hollow gay,
 Be reared and blossom out of reach and sight,
 Wind-sown, the nursling of warm genial light,
 She dwells ; and there dwells deep in polished walls
 The one companion to her lot that falls,
 Her body's double, for her soul's one friend,
 That still with her to every task doth bend,
 And lends a hand when she her needle threads ;
 In step with her across the carpet treads,

And ghost-like heaves a sigh that is not heard,
 And shapes with shadowy lips a soundless word,
 Whene'er Danaë has a sigh to heave
 Or drops a word that makes the silence grieve
 To think it was but one. This sister strange,
 That circling wider round her life doth range,
 She hath believed more neat, graceful and kind,
 Since in herself she blemishes can find;
 And, when she does, her quick eyes turn within,
 So never catch the fair repeated sin:
 And, when again she glances toward her glass,
 She views her own reproachful mute "alas";
 For from the walls across the disk it steals
 Like a dear friend come close to say, she feels
 All sorrow at her misbehaving friend;
 But, ere she speak, those admonitions end
 On finding sorrow, all as deep as hers,
 Welcome her own. Stretched upon glistening furs
 There, like still, fallen statues on old lawns,
 Deep puzzles for the country-minded fauns,
 These sisters slumbering lie. While mimic sun
 Up one outstretched arm, cautious, crawls, up one
 Real sun-lips steal, a-quiver yet to scare,
 So lose, their prize; whom Zeus is well aware
 Lies not a-purpose in his path. From fear
 He even forbids the swallows twitter near.

While in her bath she washed herself that morn
 A dizzy whirl had from her senses borne
 The startled soul; first, ere she strove to rise
 All trembling with the blankness of surprise,
 (She may have been day-dreaming in the water)
 Flashing live from its surface, sunlight caught her;
 Next, struggling up and out on towels spread
 Soft snowy for her wet bare feet to tread,
 The bath she fancied stood not where it used;

*How and at
 what time the
 swoon took her
 during which
 she became
 induced to that
 element of love
 thence forward
 to dwell therein.*

*Though escaping
that extrava-
gance of know-
ledge which
knows what it is
not, she being
good shall think
no evil*

The room swam round her then. Dizzy, confused,
Turning half wildered with the rocking light
That leapt up off the new-quit water bright
And gave her chase, she turns, and turns, and sinks,
Half tries to think, yet knows she nothing thinks,
But droops along beyond the towelled space,
Feels a warm darkness close down o'er her face:
And feels no more nor hears her nurse's knocks
Or voice that bids her raise the latch that locks
The door from the inside: the light is round her
And Zeus as in a golden sea has drowned her
To which she is not native, but endued
Shall be ere long, and then, with life renewed
Shall, sweet soul, to its depths be a mute fish,
Yet not know Zeus's will: he doth not wish
That she should know, but is more than content
Searching to find her all his love had meant,
As fresh, as gladdening as her body's beauty
In thought and will, which call themselves not duty
But are what they should be,—entirely give
The guerdon for which life is bound to live:—
Self-appröbation of such inwardness,
It could grow conscious but by being less.

*Of her coy dis-
trust of the Light
and how she be-
came more
friendly with it*

Daily, it had been, when some hour entered
In at her casement high, Zeus even dared
Come close up to the tall embroidering frame.
Just as his fingers set her wools aflame,
She started up to move more in the shade;
Still on he crept, and still she was afraid
To feel his touch; so his light widened, till
No shade, except beneath the window-sill,
Was left; there crouched she in the broadening belt
And watched the crimson of his last rays melt.
She liked to see and dodge him round the room,
Which was great fun; he gone, all grew to gloom.

So had she done, oh often, very oft!
But change had come, a gradual change and soft,
Stealing as in fur slippers to her side,
And taught her less to hurry, more to glide.
She stole away still when broad rays encroached;
But now, as though she feared to be reproached,
Would hold her hand back in their golden shower,
Then instantly withdraw it: round her bower
Was thus pursued and stooped beneath the sill,
Like one whom awe and silence wholly fill
And wonder at the expanse of warmth, of power,
Of light, of glory: and the twilight hour
Had oft surprised her in such ecstasies.
Then had she risen stiffly from her knees
To gaze out on the tranquillizing hues,
Blues that are almost gray, grays that are blues,
And as the stars came out would then recall
The thoughts that hour would bring when she was small.
For then of old her nurse would lift her where
She might well watch old darkness overbear
The youthful light whom all things plead for,—sheep
Who bleat and lowing herds and, half asleep,
Birds, ever loath to note how day's cup fills
With joy; and stables, then, and woods and hills
Hush up; nymphs, centaurs, folk with tails and horns,
Settle themselves in nooks near lulling bourns.
Then, floated to her head, came children's chatter,
And she, it may be, startled by such clatter,
Would let her eyes droop down to darkening earth,
And watch them playing in their noisy mirth.
Ofttimes they, quarrelling, fell by the ears
For some small sudden play-chance; then her tears
Ran fast, and such upheaving sobs would rend
Her slight frail frame as would not know an end
Till she was tucked up in her neat white bed;
When would commence a coursing through her head

Of wond'ring queries, how their love and hate
Were roused, till stunned by sleep importunate.

*A confession
that childhood
has not been left
and an excuse
for fondness*

Why! are we back again in childhood's time?
Never but thus life leaves that balmy clime,
To strong returns of infant tenderness
Yielding, and wisely; and we likewise, yes,
Will yield and slowly travel from those days
As she made journey slowly; oft with grace
Turned and kissed moods which had been parted with,
And gaining joy herself to us shall give.

*Of her small
knowledge con-
cerning love*

So tall and slender later on she grew
That, planted on a footstool, she could view
The many lanes that led up through the fields,
In which stroll, towards where deeper shadow shields
First fallen leaves, two, whose young summer grieves
That autumn litter should, as withered leaves
Haunt the hedge skirt, hang round their bowering bliss
Dead moods of light-foot spring which now they miss.
They loiter on and the withdrawing sky
Pities feet slow in dust, higher, more high,
Recedeth and expandeth wider o'er them,
Softened with prescience of the years before them.
They, late, in most reposeful country life,
Have found unrest and something of the strife
Of hearts, which cruel Eros loves to see.
What balm was theirs to soothe, as peacefully
They went, arm-linked? what made them so content
In silence thus to walk, together leant?
Boundless and vague, deep wishes welled in her;
Wide grew her eyes; and through the echoing air
A memory (sad, single, precious scrap
Of love-lore) sang, (while round her eyes she'd wrap
Her hair to blind them), what she once had heard
A poor girl sing:—so sorrow's tide recurred:

“Haste thee, haste thee to my arms;
Like a vine torn from a tree,
Hang they, emptied of thy charms,
Helplessly.
Drooping, can I longer hide
What I am, that’s not thy bride?”
Like some sick leaf a fierce wind hunts alone
Proving its gold ring false on stem and stone,
This feather from Love’s wing to Danaë blew.
Ignorant of his name was she, nor knew
Aught of his antic gambols with the maids,
As, when she questions, her old nurse upbraids.
This crone, be sure, had had instruction strict,
To see how ’tis she lets herself be tricked
To talk of love, men’s manners, women’s wiles;
Therefore, well-taught how innocence beguiles
The weak lips to unwise discovery,
Has bound her tongue to stay most silently
Within her mouth, till, grown so taciturn,
Her gossip’s-heart has learnt to never yearn
For converse, though she truly loves the child—
Who, the song sung, let loose her hair and smiled.
Soon lifted eyes were tempted off anew
Among the stars, those eyes most simply true
Thought but small holes drilled through a roof, the sky:
What should she know of gods or destiny,
Of Zeus, sky-king, or Kypris and her doves?
What was to tell of them except their loves?
No prayer she said; nor had she learnt to muse
How life’s a dream, or of the soul that sues
For speech from out the frost-bound lips of fate;
Nor knew she aught of the omniscience great,
Or how her small mind some would father so.
Yet there of mystery was what she might know
Who had found tokens in her tiny round;
That little limit of her life was ground

Sufficient for a larger, lovelier growth,
 Attaching meanings to the light; how loath
 It was to shine, she thought, through such small holes
 When the vast void, through which the day's sun rolls,
 It could flood, ending night's long thirst unslakèd;
 Yet could not clothe in words her fancy's naked
 Beauty. Since her vocabulary small,
 Drafted from out her nurse's, might not call
 Her thoughts by name, she smiled them to her side,
 A mind's eye-harvest sweeter, not more wide,
 Than filled a miser-barrel's cynic-round
 Of sky-blue. Disentangled and unwound,
 Her idea of the home of blessedness,
 Whence stars shone, could not lull such vague distress
 As bosky gardens rouse in glow-worm eyes,—
 Could not release from fear or authorize
 The hopes it fed; but as that insect creeps,
 Peering through haze which its own radiance steeps,
 And shown by light, that haunts it like a ghost,
 A few tufts; so the things her life loves most
 Are shown to her with disproportionate worth,
 Lit by a heart as lonely from its birth
 As on the moors a glow-worm star at night:
 Poor lone heart wandering far from realms of light!
 Her swoon's dream is, that she, transported thither,
 Loves, wanders, close-companioned, near a river;
 Un-characterized the friend, whose arms embrace her
 Slow pacing down a path star-daisies trace there.
 Meanwhile at home and far from such a place,
 The sun, stretched o'er her, showers on her face
 Kisses, that meet no blush, nor dint the snow:
 Thus summer wastes, for all the high peaks know.

*Of the brazen
 tower and of her
 father's jolly*

Yet, brilliant with bright brass, the tower derides
 The sun's gold shafts; which strike and on all sides,
 Glance like bright-parried laughter, spread; and some
 In bravery bend back whence they have come,

And try their strength with those that come direct,
 With their full genial potency unchecked,
 From the god's heart. Oh vanity of pride!
 In which a royal miser hopes to hide
 His coward purpose, at his child's expense,
 Starving her of those benefits immense
 Which, to the growing soul, friendship and love
 Yield like boon climates. Is not Zeus above?
 And will he be accomplice to thy fears?
 What weapons hast thou 'gainst him, save thy tears,
 If thou dost think to oppose? How! has he given
 His oracle, yet, still out-braving heaven,
 Standeth thy coward boast of hollow brass?
 Oh vanity of vanities, alas!

Yet she is loved: Zeus well has weighed her need;
 Although the wealth within her be not freed,
 And she know not, as oft it is not known
 To maids whom hearts of worth have claimed their own,
 That she is loved. No haunting of her mind
 By gaze or voice sets in; still shall she find
 Solace in things unthankful, for her yearning.
 Yet now dark silence warms, her fate is turning
 From life love-stinted overmuch; for save
 Her nurse, no one to love, or that could crave
 Her love, she knew, thus let heart-worship fall
 Portioned to dead things—as some silken shawl,
 That she would hold against her cheek—kiss it,
 Space out, and bid its folds her fancy fit;
 Till thus an afternoon be whiled away,
 Fondling its foolish yards. Another day
 Brought flowers that came in pitchers, or a load
 Plumping an apron, or else singly stowed
 In with the butter, sprinkled o'er the fruit,
 Or making dewy nests for eggs. First mute
 For gladness, next with clapping hands, on feet
 That totter with impatience, see her greet

*Of how the love
 with which she
 was loved al-
 though unknown
 to her caused a
 brightening in
 her days*

With airy kisses little friends—small eyes
Glorious with gazing on the liberal skies,
Sent by the open-hearted folk who wonder
“How fares small prisoner princess penned up yonder!
Friends, but ah! torture like to tongue-tied love,
She knew no names for heartsease, or foxglove;
The spindle-parsley, purple vetch, the clover
Were all as nameless as her trance’s lover;
She coo’d above them sounds in pet-names ’stead.
Sweet “Aphrodite’s navel,” “nipple-red,”
Her “fly-trap,” or her son “Love in a mist,”
Or crimson may called “kisses double-kissed” —
Such were the only names her old nurse knew,
But told not, fearing she’ld explain them too.
Next in her favour stood some exile shells—
Large lips, agape with wonder-working spells,
Which the ear hearing, vainly the mind strove
To dredge a meaning from. So oft she wove
With nets and toils of hair one to her ear,
Deep in that cushion sunk she found most dear,
Her feet out-thrust on the mat most to her mind,
Because, ’mid green waved lines, it showed a kind
Of ready needle-pictured likeness to
Her whole bare body, over which there flew
Much smaller portraits of herself, as she
Is to her mind brought back by memory.
As thus she sits, her treasures piled about,
Words foil her ears that, in a sailor’s shout—
“Aphrodite,
Each wave mothers
Thine almighty
Form; uncovers
It each breeze,
Thee to please,
And to tease
All thy lovers.”

Sun down, the thick swoon from her body lifted :
So, from frost-filmèd tarn, a mist unlifted
Lifts, yet hangs waiting near. A vivid grey
Blinded her; night's cold coming drove away
Her sense once more; she slept, while pain did drum
With muffled hands her temples dull and numb.
Confusedly capricious dreams have wrung
Those tones from her with which that girl had sung—
“Unsupported by thine arms,
Like a vine torn from a tree,
Hang they, emptied of thy charms,
Helplessly . . .”
While, as sea-chants climb twisted shells to bed,
Male words through dainty doors have reached her head.

*Of her swoon's
ending and of a
confused inter-
val of pain
which continued
into her dreams*

And from this night, as some fond woman sits
Beside her love, she with the sun, when its
First matin wealth plunged on her shoulder, till,
Having bathed and blessed her, it slipped o'er the sill.
Her soul subdued to might of things concealed,
The purpose of her being unrevealed
Worked through her, changed her; so a female swan,
Who, young, till then without a care sailed on,
Quits the delightful mirror of the lake
And mid the rushes doth herself betake
To build a nest; the first that she hath made,
Nor yet foresees its use. So now obeyed
Danaë instinct's deep imperative;
Great tenderness she to her voice doth give,
Her movements grow more lulling and woo more,
Her smiles come trembling from her heart's full core;
Like a brimmed bowl in gleeful anxious hands
Her features shake with rapture: there she stands
Tranced, while the future thrills her through and through,
Feeling more good than she knows reason to,
As though she had been conquered from within

*Of the change
that from that
time was work-
ed in her, and
how she made a
little store of
treasures for her
baby though she
knew not of his
coming. And
how at the same
time she began
to neglect the re-
flections of her-
self both in
mirror and wall
and took to sit-
ting in the sun*

And her lord, Love, through her the world would win.
 While, from dim distance, drowned in walls that gleam,
 There waits for her approach, as it would seem,
 Her hazy golden double, waits and smiles;
 Poor warder shade, who never more beguiles
 Her charge of interest; for squirrel-souled
 Danaë now puts by. Her hoard will hold
 No treasure more full soon; all are designed
 For some one; who that some one is her mind
 Has no clear knowledge; yet her wealth set out,
 Her terra-cotta friends stood all about,
 She sits among them and she smiles at each
 And sometimes seems surprised they still lack speech.
 Then takes the dearest with brown curls and cap
 Pale blue: him smiling, naked, will she wrap
 In her best kerchief, and away he goes
 To wait in the dark hoard. Zeus only knows
 Who 'tis he waits for there with balls of silk,
 Shells, silver trinkets, and gold mugs; her milk
 She now drinks from a bowl of maple wood,
 Yet surely finds it twice as rich and good.
 So changed she was. The world too seemed becalmed;
 All summer usage lingered unalarmed.
 For the fierce forest-fires of autumn sped
 Slower, glowed larger with less hectic red,
 To equal the great glow of July gold.
 It seemed that ne'er, they fallen low, their cold
 White ashes would be huddling round the farms
 And choking in at doors. On false alarms
 Birds flew to sea: still the bland weather stayed;
 Later, the roof of clouds, rent through or frayed,
 On winter's lap let warm boons drop, to cheer
 Men's hearts. Such fondling had the tower dear,
 Where each and all those gleams are welcomed like
 A lover's letter. When young breezes strike
 A tune, and Spring, spry wanton, comes, her nurse

*How the spring
 returning made*

Looks puzzled, makes her pinched-up lips to purse
And her eyes blink, bewildered, at the maid,
Who goldly glimmers in the gleam. Afraid
They have not told her of the thing aright,
She falls to rubbing them with all her might;
For, lo! a woman with child, no maid, is that
Sits where the maid a year before had sat.
She fain had got to scolding, but delayed,
So clear the eyes she met; and then she prayed
She might be much mistaken, and still knew
She was not; such a queer knot how undo?
For she had ne'er an instant left the tower,
Scarcely the room for much more than an hour.

*many things ap-
parent that be-
fore were hid
and of her
father's conse-
quent panic and
cruelty*

Who could have done this thing? O ye great gods,
Walls, locks, and all man's cares make little odds
To you, when once ye have a mind a thing
Shall be: well may a man stare, whistle, sing,
And blow upon his nails, if ye have entered
With him a race on which perhaps had centered
Dozens of spangled hopes—or life; 'tis one,
And the race won before 'tis ever run.
So, when a boy-child came to light, her father
Had to be told he was grandsire; though rather
His ears had heard his daughter, pined away
In prison lone, was gone to swell, that day,
The dim ranks of his dead who wait in earth's
Strongholds, all kings, or issue by their births
Of kings, or queens, or queenly-mothered.
He felt as though an ire-forged bolt o'erhead
Was hurtling wilfully, like to the disc
Young men in rivalry hurl, whereby great risk
Is run by such as watch: so, all at once,
Fear, worst midwife for action, did ensconce
Herself within the unheroic head
Of king Acrisius; and straightway from bed

Women she knows not drag the hapless girl.

*Of her journey
toward the open
sea. The great
element whose
energy conquers
fear and gives
freedom, teach-
ing to all men a
true knowledge
of themselves: so
that some be-
come beasts
through sojourn
upon it, and
some heroes. But
she shall be
taught to know
her happiness
that she may
continue in
blessedness*

A chest they brought inlaid with jet and pearl,
With ivory incrustations held by nails
Of orichalc: yet seasoned, such as sails
For months uninjured o'er the salt Levant
The dovetailed cedar frame. Bevelled, I grant,
Were the long reeds that ribbed its seams within:
And yet their purpose with it was but sin!
The cumbrous lid had been prized from its hinges,
Blood, from torn fingers shed then, grimly tinges
Darker the dark wood near their former place;
Oh, deep and broad and long enough the space
Its scented sides enclosed; cushion and shawl
They stint no more than for an alcove small,
Draped that a queen might chat with a princess:—
Their hearts were hard as naked planks no less!
They placed the frightened mother in this box
Still in her night-shift. Nought she strives, but rocks
And rocks her baby, rocks her own heart's terror;
And by this meekness double-dyes their error,
Who lift her down and round the tower stair
And strap the huge chest firmly to a pair
Of long stout litter poles; the slaves flag not,
But set it swinging, breaking to a trot,
And on she passes through the town, shawl-hid,
Like muffled granddame to a banquet bid.
She hears the castanets of dancing girls,
But scents no drugg'd whiffs from their shaken curls;
She hears the slaves hail those who block the way,
Sees not the torch-lit market bright as day;
She hears loud hearty sailors, in their tavern,
Rousing its gaunt drift-timbers like a cavern.
Sees not the painted goddess, its lewd sign,
Soused by the hiccuping roysterers, drip with wine;
Sees not the pine brand blaze above the quay,

But hears armed heels crunch shingle heavily.
While for this cause the chest uneasy reels,
Under and through the wraps it stirs, she feels
A fresh wet wind and hears the weltering wash
Of waters; then the poles run out, feet splash:
And, when, set down again, she raised her eyes,
She saw the simple stars, that in surprise
Were crowded close together. Long she, dazed,
Lay like a fallen winged-thing; while the raised
Male voices dwindled till the dipping oars
Could make their rhythm felt. Then low-banked shores,
To rowlock's dullèd beat, processional,
Parade black-blotted groups of poplar tall
Like mutes; between their trunks, like lines of tombs,
On either side behind, the night mist glooms:
And like some broken-hearted woman bent
That heaves her hair with sobs, as on she went,
A willow kneels among them here and there.
The water wakes and louder wails to her—
Nay, wails with old choked sorrows now no more:
Triumphant shouts, borne from a sonorous shore,
Break up her trance, and happy hurried airs
Make haste—lest she, when shaken unawares
On Aphrodite's cradle-rockers, fear—
To whisper good-will tidings in her ear.
A boat had laboured with the chest in tow:
Dull wooden sounds faint; homeward it doth go.
All this long time she held her baby tight,
And stared the poor stars out with all her might:
Now, looking down, she sees his waking eyes
Claim—as his curled gold locks the sun—the skies
In parentage. She dandles in the air
The pretty wanton; who then clips her hair
In fist-fulls, crows, and o'er her shoulder spies
Hermes with Zephyrs wing'd like dragon-flies,
Who, watchful how such frolic crew behaves,

Pilots them o'er blue inly-varied waves.
So many blues, yet each unlike the other,
Grow all greens, when a Zephyr flies his brother.
In vain the gallant Hermes doffs his hat;
For jealous Zeus gave strict commandment, that
His messenger should do his duty, dight
In form impalpable to mortal sight:
Yet, well seen of the baby demi-god,
He from the merry knave receives a nod.
Far, far behind the tall grey tower stands
Against the north, as left by Night's rash hands
On brilliant-breasted Dawn, a bruise of blue,
To fade as her hale pulse revives anew!

*Of why she
should be con-
sidered most
blessed*

O happier thou than women, who must know
At last by day-light, not moon's opal glow,
Him whom they loved,—thou, loved by the unknown,
A mother, all a mother's joys thine own,
Without the pain that overtakes a wife
To learn love lasts a season, not for life,
Must be replaced by friendship at the best,—
Thou, thou art happy in thy wave-rocked nest,
Not to have loved, not to have known a lover,
Yet with fond kisses thus thy babe to cover!

Of joy set free

This god-freed, god-loved woman hail aloud,
Breezes! your king the sun mounts o'er yon cloud.
Swell those big-chested conchs, strain trumpet-throats;
He hears and knows you, though she little notes.
Still the sad silent home, that distance veils,
Each moment bears behind, as on she sails
To new life, lit with large affinities;
And for her son Perseus what destinies
Await, beyond the sounding straits that sunder
Dead past from future life! On sailed they under
The tingling blue, till, lo! Seriphos, reared
Above a million moving waves, appeared.

REFLECTED VISIONS
AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED TO
JOHN COPLEY

FROM PYGMALION
BY EDWARD BURNE-JONES

TO work at sunrise nor till sunset rest,
Week's end spliced in week's end: 'twas thus he wrought;
And I have often seen him in my thought
With eager bare arms leant across her breast
To chisel chin or cheek, while, where they pressed,
His labour's sweat made bright the marble bust;
Till lo! she stands amid the workshop dust
In proudest pose of loveliness undressed.
His work once stayed, he, weakened by long strife,
Falls like a swathe from summer-heat's keen scythe:
So sees he, waking at the day's decease,—
Not the sea-mothered Mother of all life,
Then vanished—but, alone, alive, he sees
A naked woman quailing at the knees.

FROM PALLAS AND THE CENTAUR
BY SANDRO BOTTICELLI

'CENTAUR, sweet Centaur, let me ride on you!'
Her face set forward toward delightful hours,
On feet uncertain as spring's dancing showers,
This Pallas like pale April finds things new;
Yet, conscious-half of much forgotten too,
Asks sparkling questions, tentative of powers,
Visits her doings as bees visit flowers.—
'Centaur, sweet Centaur, scatter far the dew!'
Round the grey sea, beyond the haunted rocks,
Crunching clean pebbles, call on Magdalen
And Egypt's Mary clothed in woolly locks;
Clamber on clouds to Mary-Mother then,
Who, virgin still, there in a palace dwells,
-Its roof one silver mass of mellow bells.

FROM BITTEN APPLES: A LITHOGRAPH
BY CHARLES HAZELWOOD SHANNON.

THEIR couch the pliant strength of lusty grass,
Cool shade of leaves their canopy, "Alas,"
Sing many maidens, crouched upon their knees
Or lain full-length along the ground for ease,
"Alas, how slow, how slow,
Time's hobby-horse can go."

Some hold their hands above their heads, to touch
And handle—Eve-forgetting—fruit, so much
Their cheeks' colour, yet cool unlike their cheeks.
Tasting their tongues have learned how "Every week's
A week of weeks; so slow
Time's hobby-horse may go."

To idle minds the day is weariness,
And to lax limbs the land heart's heaviness;
Lo, all their pangs are healed! Long time ago
Hunter Love satisfied hung up his bow.
Their song dies down as slow
As Time's play-horse dare go.

FROM SAPPHO'S DEATH: THREE PICTURES BY GUSTAVE MOREAU.

I

AMID a wilderness of rock-piled towers
She sits; dank raiment shudders o'er her grace;
A damp from Lethe doth its pride efface:
Chilled through, she sits and waits impending hours.
Her dark loosed hair is crowned with heavy flowers;
One cold hand grips her unhewn throne; in place
The other keeps her falling veil; her face
Is trodden battle-field of passion's powers.
—Sits quiet, and complains of nobody:
No anguished sighs her tortured lips dispart;
But always in her ears and through her heart
The waves a ceaseless cruel parody
Of her last fruitless love-song chant and sing,
Nor will her sore heart deaden to the sting.

II

With hands vibrating, with lips trembling still,
Her sister heart and lute strings snapt in twain,
Like one chord, struck and overtaxed by pain,
She falls; and her dark gowns with salt wind fill
Like those black sails which turned the sunshine chill
For Minotaur-doomed crews—fill too in vain;
Her bare feet, stiffened, gleam like gulls new-slain,
'Mid gulls who hoarsely shriek an omen ill:
She falls, as through a dream's suspense that strains
The moment's heart with Time's immensity—
As down Truth's well fond cups whence Hope ne'er gains
The draught that quencheth thirst's entirety:
She falls, but her voice soars and yet remains—
Suspends her yet in immortality.

III

Stilled is the sea, the cliffs stand hugely still,
While the sun dies ; but in the sky a crowd
Of tattered banners desolate, mute, and proud,
Marshalling, honours his departing skill.
Love strove with Song, and Love has now his will ;
Apollo's forces have drawn off, and loud,
Afar, Love hails his dame ; her foe has bowed ;
Save those sad clouds at Lesbos, all is still.
Yet pulses of white wings loom o'er the deep,
Unanimous in steady-purposed quest
Of Sappho, who at last finds peace in sleep ;
The first stoops o'er her now as o'er its nest :
From Paphos' dovecotes come they here to keep
A pious vigil at their queen's behest.

FROM PUVIS DE CHAVANNE'S COUNTRY

A SPACIOUS land lies large in broad daylight
Where warm wind healthily goes to and fro,
As some dear woman here might come and go ;
In courtesy the trees incline their height,
Rustling their robes as folk at a wedding might ;
And full of flowers the grass, by scythes laid low,
Scents the sunshine, while pores the fond willow
Over pride's paradise in waters bright.
A patriarchal people dwell in peace
And plenty, perfect without wealth's increase ;
Nursed in the lap of lowland hills, their homes
Are gay with flowers ; both morn and evening airs
Are guests within their doors ; and for their prayers
Cows safely calve, bees build big honey-combs.

FROM TITIAN'S 'BACCHANAL' IN THE PRADO AT MADRID.

SHE naked lies asleep beside the wine
That in a rill wanders through moss and flowers;
Her head thrown, and her hair, back o'er an urn
Whose metal glints from under crimped gold
Of lately bound-up locks; while her flushed face
Breathes up toward open sky with fast-closed lids,—
As though, half-conscious, her complexion knew
Where stirred the tree-tops, where the blue was vast.
One arm, wrapped in a soft white crumpled vest,
An empty wine-dish guards; her breasts are young;
Young, although massive, torso, loins and thighs,
All hued as clouds are that the morning face.
Beside her foot three shadowed blue flowers glow,
Speedwell, or gentian, or some now lost gem
That then was found in Crete; some gem now lost,
Some precious flower, that then endeared the isles
To hearts of travelling gods and sailor princes.
Though friends of such an one here revel now,
And laugh, carouse, and dance, she hears them not;
Brown satyrs, mænads, men, these sing; and hark!
Birds sing, the sea is sighing, and the woods
Do sound as lovers love to hear them:—Sleep,
Sleep, oh! and wake no more; Bacchus has kissed
Thy lips, thine eyes, thy brow; thy joy and his
But lately were as one, therefore sleep on:
Be all past woes forgotten in thy dream!
This noisy crew still haunts thee;—but unheard
They sing, and birds are singing; thou dost sleep:
These dance, carouse, and pledge each other's joy;
Slowly the tree-tops, in the wind's embrace,
Dance too; lush branches and gay vestures float,
Float, wave and rustle, sighing to the wind;
But thou art still; thou sleepest, art divine.
Upon the purple clusters, in his drowse,

The vast Silenus rolls ; and through the grass
The red juice trickles, forming rills and streams ;
Comes down cascading, prattles past thy couch,
And winds on sea-ward ; thou remainest, thou,
Perfectly still remainest and dost sleep.
These soon will leave thee,—satyr, mænad, faun,
Light-hearted young folk,—these will never stay
Past sundown nor out-watch the pale long eve,
But troop afar with fainter riot and song.
Then, when thou art alone and the wind dropped,
When the night finds thee, mayst thou still be sleeping :
She then, for ever and for aye, will take thee
To her deep dwelling and unechoing halls ;
How could she leave thee ? she who owns them all—
Owns all the stars, whose beauty is complete,
Whose joy is perfect, and whose home is peace ;
While all their duty is to shine for love.

ABSALOM
A CHRONICLE PLAY
AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED TO
WILLIAM ARTHUR PYE

CHARACTERS

DAVID, KING OF ISRAEL

ABSALOM, SON OF DAVID BY MAACAH

SOLOMON, SON OF DAVID BY BATHSHEBA

AHITOPHEL, CHIEF OF DAVID'S, AFTER-
WARDS OF ABSALOM'S COUNCIL

JONADAB, NEPHEW TO DAVID AND OF
HIS COUNCIL

JOAB AND ABISHAI, BROTHERS, MIGHTY
WARRIORS OF DAVID'S COUNCIL

BENAIAH AND ITTAI, CAPTAINS

ZADOK AND ABIATHAR, THE PRIESTS
SERAIAH, THE SCRIBE

HUSHAI, A FRIEND OF DAVID'S AND SEC-
OND IN ABSALOM'S COUNCIL

LEMUEL, A SHEPHERD, ARMOUR-BEAR-
ER TO ABSALOM

AHIMAAZ, SON OF ZADOK

JONATHAN, SON OF ABIATHAR

CUSHI, ARMOUR-BEARER TO JOAB

ZIBA, STEWARD TO MERIB-BAAI, SON
OF JONATHAN

SHIMEI, A DESCENDANT OF THE HOUSE
OF SAUL

ELKANAH, HUSBAND OF MIKAL

TAMAR, OWN SISTER TO ABSALOM

REBECCA, WIFE TO LEMUEL

MIKAL AND LEAH, HONEST WOMEN

RUTH, MERAB, AND OTHERS, CONCU-
BINES TO DAVID

SONS OF DAVID, ELDERS OF THE PEOPLE,
WATCHMEN, SOLDIERS, PEOPLE, POR-
TERS, SERVANTS

SCENE: JERUSALEM, THE FORD OF KID-
RON, WOODLAND PLACES & MAHANAIM

ACT I. SCENE I

ABSALOM is discovered in a wood, pulling down saplings by their boughs until the stems crack and they fall towards him. It is noon. A cloak lies on the ground. With arms and knees bare he is dressed in a loose silken vest and boots of leopard skin; straps for hunting knives, horn, pouch, &c., are slung across his shoulders, chains jangle round his neck; and when he straightens up, letting his arms fall, bracelets clatter to his wrists. Pausing to mop his brow he speaks:

Did Samson sweat so to lug Dagon down?

Or cracked the pillars with more loud report

That bore his house up—stones that yielding closed
On sweeter anguish than Delilah ever

Shared in his arms? Doth not this rush of leaves

Sound much as roof and hangings floundering down
Upon those feasting proud Philistian lords?

[holding out his hair]

My locks are long as Samson's—woven, would make
A splendid web to woo a woman with.

[He grapples another tree and forcing it down cries]

Down, Adonijah, son of Haggith, down!

O beautiful Adonijah, bow, for I

Am fairer yet than thou!

[turning to the largest of the trees he has broken]

And thou, I see,

The first that bowed, art still the greatest. Thou

Art Ammon, eldest of my brothers, first

To bow. And what more likely? Woman-mad

And dissipated in an hundred beds,

Thou dost displease great David.

[turning to the trees one by one] See too,

Shammuah, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon—

Slim wise-boy Solomon, and Chileab

The son of Abigail, and Eglah's son

And little trotting Ibhar and the babe,

This flower frail-stemmed.—Elishama, bow thee too.
[speaking he bends down the head of a tall flower and sets his foot on it. During the above AHITOPHEL has entered but keeps close among the trees.]

[ABSALOM continues, seating himself on that stem which he has addressed as AMMON]

Like sheaves in Joseph's dream they all bow down.

Yet this is not a dream: 't will come more true.

Seer Nathan said, God humbled man in wrath,

Bade him to force subsistence from the earth

And struggle for supremacy once his,

And I believe him: nothing less than scorn

Had equalled me with leopards—hardly me

With lions—beggars groundedly may hope;

Yea, beasts, birds, trees and weeds push for the best.

Must I compete with all who breathe in air?

Tread daisies out of life? Put flies in mourning?

Rob bees of labour? See sweet roses fade

To humour me? Cause women to shed tears

To bear me children? Why, of course I must!

All do; for it is life to reign thus strictly.

And shall I fear to be a man? Old fool

This Nathan with his god-loved paupers was.

I will be proud; for beautiful I am.—

Come, brothers, all is mine or nothing. Give

Or I refuse, and go and lie me down

Among the dogs and muck-heaps till I die.

[seeing AHITOPHEL]

Yes, I am beautiful, and thou art not;

This tree left standing lives, and these do not;

My father slew the giant, thine did not;

The hills are lifted up, the coasts are not:

David has many sons; would he had not:

To meet, see, hear and envy brothers, I

Have feet, eyes, ears and heart; would I had not,

Ahitophel!

AHITOPHEI. Hush, beautiful Absalom!
Thou wastest kingly power. Thou hast despoiled
A many trees of promise; why? Wouldst thou
Feed pride and pamper vanity with leaves,
Which die as they have lived and know it not?
Who of his toil lacks profit is a fool;
Labour that doth effect no betterment
Is crowned with laughter. Pardon that I laugh.
[laughing]

Sooth God himself must laugh too at such times;
Though he grow angry ere his laugh be out.

ABSAIOM

Yet there is none of all my father's sons
But makes men laugh at folly: this one, drunk,
With dim self-exculpations woos his slave;
This, sick with love, walks stealthy like a thief;
Another, vain, puts on his father's clothes;
And one hunts through the forest, growing wild,
Striving for honour not with men, but beasts.
Oh, I am fair; there is no fault in me!
And when I wake each morning, I stand up
And say—'Go build a tower on yon hill'—
'My lord, the land is Joab's,' smiles my slave;
I see a woman—'tis some other's wife;
A house—my brother's. Then I bite my lips
And long to break the law so many do,
(Our father pardons most things in his sons)
But thus I fear to lose the chiefest good,
The crown that, as age bows him, slips and slips
From off his drowsy head

[leaping up] For whom? A king!
Ah, there's not one is beautiful like me,
Or has so fair a record in his eyes;
Nathless I am not safe; he loves the late
Out of proportion with the earlier born,
And Solomon is very near his heart;

Besides the boy is wise, though plain enough.—
Nor is there one of all the forty odd
But some chance whim might crown in my despite.

AHITOPHEL

Be prudent, bide thy time; thy brothers all
Lack not the gift that brings them to the ground.
Virtue is such a gift where is no vice;
'Twill trip a young man neatly. Solomon
Maybe will grow too wise. Win people's love!
Thy father's voice drops faint; when nations shout
They never fail of being heard; what's said
By one old dying man, may well be lost
If all a people shout at the right time.

ABSALOM

Thy wisdom is as certain as God's word:
All men are led by thee; thou art the king's
Fixed star; and I by thee will shape my course;
Pilot me till my father's crown be mine.
Ahitophel, the whole world says of thee
'His words stand fast as oracles of God.'

AHITOPHEL

Well, bide thy time and get thee many friends!
Look round! If some one can be helped, help him!
There's this one has been wronged; him use well!
Admit the justness of all men's complaints!
Pretend it angers thee to see wrong done.
It doth? Well, let it visibly! Be loud
Against the wrong, but name no names! To-day's
Not thine, nor yet to-morrow; thine will come.

ABSALOM

I seize a promise; thou dost point a path!
Who hath touched power so near as when I have
Stood, beautiful upon a hill at dawn,
And felt a crown descending from above,
While light mapped out mine empire? Yet how soon

I felt the sun despise me from the sky,
And feared mere accidents' ascendancy.
Thus alternates condition everywhere;
Having been splendid once the year grows down;
God only is secure!

AHITOPHEL And those who, wise,
Wait and walk where he lets them; win his love,
Never opposed to what he brings about,
Ruled by what he has done and likeliest means.

ABSALOM

Oh! come away, these trees bemock my hopes;
They bowed not to me by the will of God. [Exeunt.]

ACT I. SCENE II.

At Jerusalem before the house of ABSALOM, which has but one storey and no windows; but the blank wall extends in such a way as to show that a spacious court is enclosed from which there rises a huge fig-tree: leaning forwards it screens the nearest portion of the flat roof. Carpets hang over the parapet: a trellis covered with fruit-laden vines forms a porch, under which squats the DOOR-KEEPER on a mat, and to either side are stone benches also in shadow. Time, evening. TAMAR [enters from the left in a long striped simar, such as were only worn by virgin daughters of the King; it is rent and soiled: ashes and dust cling to her disordered hair; sobbing, she beats her face; when at the door, she addresses the keeper]

Is Absalom, my brother, now within?

DOOR-KEEPER

Princess, he hunts to-day as every day.

[She sits down on the stone bench to the right, and continues to strike her face, weeping bitterly. The DOOR-KEEPER rises and goes within the house; whence, immediately, in a crowd, the servants flock forth.]

AN OLD WOMAN Jehovah, what is this?

A MAN [in a whisper]

Of some man hath a Princess suffered shame?

ANOTHER

If it be so, will David e'er abide it?

OLD MAN

Hush, hush, she prays: pray we she be avenged!

[Many of the women rend their clothes and throw dust on their hair, uttering cries in imitation of TAMAR.]

OLD MAN

My lord doth love his sister very dearly;

He surely will avenge her. Pray for it. [a silence]

DOOR-KEEPER [addressing TAMAR]

Behold, my lord descendeth yonder hill;

Up from the east he comes, alone he comes;

There is no quarry borne behind my lord.

TAMAR Go every man in quietly, let none

Prepare to welcome home his lord; keep close!

While I myself will stand behind this vine;

There, reach ye me a cup wherein to press

A bunch of grapes, that he may quench his thirst.

ABSALOM [entering on the right]

I am no king indeed; no slaves, see, stand

To bow me through the portals of my house.

Ahitophel, patience and policy

Must King me.

TAMAR [stretching her hand forth from the vine]

Drink, my lord.

[ABSALOM starts.]

My lord is thirsty?

ABSALOM [takes the cup and drinks, pausing]

Thou sayest true. [He drinks again, pausing]

A woman's? Tamar's voice?

[draining the cup]

Nay, a dry voice, a stranger voice; whose then?

TAMAR The draught was good?

ABSALOM

The draught could not be sweeter, nor the hand
That proffered it, more lovely. But the face,
That owns the hand, should . . .

TAMAR [breaking forth] 'Sweet' a child's drink!
A man drinks wine—old wine is yet too thin!
My brother must drink blood!

ABSALOM Jehovah! who,
Who hath wronged thee? Or . . . Is my father dead?
Nay, thou art shamed! This is some brother's deed!
Oh, say it was a brother!

TAMAR Ammon.

ABSALOM Ammon!
I love thee, Ammon. Thou dost break thy neck.
'Ammon the first to bow'—indeed 'tis true!
I will go straight and sheathe my sword in him.

TAMAR
Brother, his house is barred; his servants . . . all
Are armed.

ABSALOM No matter! Samson would not wait.
Yet . . . Policy, patience, Ahitophel!
But no; blood's needed! called for! I must drink;
'Twas thou saidst so; Tamar, look at me!

Dost spy some weakness? Search! Fear I his slaves?
This policy is so like cowardice.
This patience seems so cold, so unlike love.

Thou, most of all the cherished of my heart,
Come to me, Tamar, come and prove my love.
Art thou then soiled? I press thy shame to me;
[tears a strip from her skirt.]

I'll wear thy shame wrapped in my turban's folds;
I'll kiss thy shame each morning, and each night
Will dream of nothing but thy shame's redress,
Sure stratagems to bring thee Ammon's head,

And prove no coward, daring love thy shame.
Come thou within ; my house is thy shame's home.
[They go within, and after a little reappear on the roof.]
ABSALOM [holding up a cup]
Yesterday I had drained this to thy health,
Sweet Tamar, now it hurts to think of thee.
To any shepherd's daughter this sad chance,
Foreknown as possible calamity,
Might have brought tears and pain, yet not despair.
That it had been before, might be again,
Had then proved comfort. Daughter of a king,
Illimitable and unique thy woe.
But worse, far worse !
The aggressor was thy brother ! that alone
Had been enough to blast the humblest lot :
O sister, there is nothing left for thee :
No grain will now be poured upon thy head,
And on thy bridegroom's head, as both are bent
To hide the mutual happy blush. Thy child
Will not be welcomed there where others play ;
He will keep near thee, and his woe become
A future far more dreadful to thy thoughts
Than thine own hidden past unspeakable.
Then not to thee, Revenge of thee, I drink ;
Let that live, waxing always to bear fruit,
Upon red wine—wine red and rich as blood.
[He raises the cup. **DAVID** enters below, seeing whom
he breaks off]
Hush, who comes here ?
[then draws **TAMAR** behind the branches of the fig.]
DAVID Solomon !
SOLOMON [running in] Father !
There are armed men stand all round Ammon's house !
DAVID
Oh, Ammon brings much trouble on mine age !
Ammon hath bowed knee to the Queen of Heaven,

A Tyrian goddess, boy; she poisons blood,
Till every woman seen maddens to lust:
Jehovah is a jealous god; and ill
To brook his anger. Wealth and length of days
He will not grant to unrepentant Ammon
Unless he mend his life. Love thou our God.

SOLOMON Father,
I thought, king Hiram's builders planted out
The Queen of Heaven's grove, what time they raised
Thy royal cedar house?

DAVID O boy, great God
Is vexed with me; mind me not of my grief!
He will not have me build his holy house:
Yet saith my seed shall build it later on.
It may be thou shalt build for God an house:
If thou dost love him he will honour thee.
But ah, the Lord, since, cursed my seed, as well!
Because of thy fair mother and my sin
'The sword shall never quit my luckless house.'

ABSALOM [dips his fingers in the cup and sprinkles
the ground before DAVID, then withdraws again.]

SOLOMON
Look! father, look! these drops that fell from heaven
And yet the sky is clear. See, they are red.

DAVID
Nay, I heard nothing fall: these drops are old,
Dripped from some sacrifice of Absalom's
As he did bring it back to feast his friends.

SOLOMON
But, father, they are wet!

DAVID Why wilt thou be
So wise? Thou wilt not let my peace alone.
Oh, say the sign's from heaven! call it blood!
Our God is far too strong to wrestle with!
Though he doth mean me ill, my seed shall reign;
My house shall stand; for he hath vowed it, child.

Let prophecy alone: 'tis an ill trade!

SOLOMON

Father, I did not seek to anger thee.

[ABSALOM sprinkles the ground a second time.]

DAVID [starting]

Come, let's away and learn why Ammon arms;

Go, call my guard to me at Ammon's house!

[Exeunt severally.]

ABSALOM [standing out on the roof]

Vengeance, use mine, not age's trembling hand!

[He drains the cup.]

Thus may I drink my brother Ammon's blood!

[The CURTAIN drops.]

ACT I. SCENE III.

King David's palace in Millo. The council-chamber surrounded by divans; the back is shut off from the central court of the Palace by reed screens and trellises of wood; leaving, however, several issues on to a flight of steps of one width with the room, which descends into the court; to the left is a casement giving over some roofs, at first closed but open later on. DAVID is seated on a cedar throne to the right; JONADAB, ABISHAI, JOAB, BENAIAH, and ZADOK and ABIATHAR the priests, on cushions which enclose a square in front of him, in the centre of which, raised on an ornate stool and pillow, are the tablets of the Chronicles corded with silken cords; SERAIAH the Scribe sits on a stool at DAVID'S feet. All are dressed in sumptuous robes, with much jewellery and many handsome arms. Clogs and slippers are ranged in pairs beside large bowls of water which stand near the doorways. Outside the sun is brilliant, making the interior rich and dim.

AHITOPHEL [risen from the cushion opposite the throne, commences to speak as the curtain lifts]

O king, fair snow lies quiet on high hills,
And summer through sleeps safe on lofty mounts,
So would white hairs, on brows of great kings, sleep;
But sleep they in like safety? O my lord,
Be patient if I blame thee for fond peace.
Art thou so wise as in thy warlike prime?
Or didst thou slip deep counsel from thy brow,
What time thou puttedst by thine iron suits,
In mind and body wearied both at once?
Thy palace deemed secure as cave sepulchral,
Art thou as little as the dead aware,
That still Jehovah doth exact his due,
And soon from this large respite, setting forth,
Will hurtle through the land with shocks of war,
A God in battles dread, a Lord of Hosts?

BEENAI AH

My lord the king, give ear to what he saith:
Thy Cherethites and Pelethites grow sad:
E'en at their feast those mighty warriors turn
And gaze each in the other's mournful eyes.

DAVID

Ahitophel, uneasy is thy mind;
Thy strenuous spirit, grudging every pause,
Chafes thee against the blessing of the Lord.
My whole life through Jehovah have I served,
Nor to Astarte, nor to Baäl bowed knee;
His mind is bent to recompense me now.
My sons are all together at a feast;
And I in council here with valiant men,
Good Jonadab my brother Shimeah's son,
Abishai, Joab, Zeruiah's sons—
A right and left arm to me fifty years,
We were together in Adullam's cave,—
Then priestly Zadok and Abiathar,
Seraiah who writes our praises down,
And, wisest of the wise, Ahitophel.

AHITOPHEL

Thy sons are all together at a feast?
But to what purpose, O my lord the king?
To Baäl-hazor is not far from hence,
Yet from the peaceful feast of sheep-shearers
Swift Trouble hither, may be, starts to run—
With Absalom thou trustest all thy sons!
Is he their father, loving them like thee?
Hath he no cause to envy or to hate?

DAVID He is their brother, very brotherly.

AHITOPHEL

Think, think, rash father, of thy absent sons!
Hath Ammon paid for love from Absalom?

DAVID It is forgotten, that repented sin,
Son Absalom has pardoned all, like me.

AHITOPHEL

‘Forgotten?’ Overweening is thy soul!
Can Tamar be ‘forgotten,’ sitting there,
Within the house of Absalom alone?
Day after day he looks on her through tears,
Brushed quickly by an angry hand away,
Which vows straight vengeance in Jehovah’s name
Being shaken toward weak Ammon’s noisy house.

DAVID

Two years have given place: if this were true,
Long since it had borne fruit—time out of mind!
But thine ambition edges thee to stretch
To looming portent, danger’s bare occasion.
Safe is the prophet of the evil day:
For men are sure to err, and soon or late
His word comes true, though for quite other cause,
When some new sin brings retribution down.

JOAB Ahitophel, I have not seen these signs
Yet oft walk with the young man Absalom,
Who loves to talk of famous Gideon’s deeds:
They fill his soul with envy worthy him.

DAVID He bears great piety towards the Lord.
 ZADOK His sacrifices nobly warrant it.
 JOAB A father's life he takes for lamp and guide,
 Begging recitals o'er and o'er again:
 When, as I pass from lofty deed to deed,
 He lifts his head and seems to mount a stair,
 Until, with royal grace, he thanks my pains
 And minds me, so, of dark Engedi's cave
 Where I saw his great father stand just thus—
 Flourish o'er head a skirt of crimson cloth
 And cry across to Saul, whose mantle, clipped,
 Fluttered like a child's shirt about his knees;
 Whose generous childlike nature straight gushed back;
 Health came again; the mad-man was the king,
 Loving that nobleness he sought to slay;
 With kingly David royal kisses changed
 And vowed with tears to hold him in his heart.
 AHITOPHEL
 All this is well; what sign did Gideon beg?
 A fleece, a fleece first dry, then wringing wet!
 Many a fleece hath Absalom sheared of late:
 Chance, he may like to soak or dye a few
 Crimson's proud colour; blood is royal dye.
 See him, now treading where his father trod,
 Heave up the purple rag above his head!
 In greater safety, with more confidence,
 He waves, and waves a dripping trophy round:
 Soon, sits in Ammon's place, as thou didst sit,
 O David, later, in the seat of Saul;
 Where, maybe he will sleep, as thou dost sleep;
 When his son, mounting where his father trod,
 Steps one step higher, dips in deeper dye
 And waves a guiltier trophy o'er him dead.
 DAVID Ahitophel, art mad? Turbulent fool,
 I am the man that I have always been,
 And thou shalt know it. Let the Lord arise,

Let trumpets blow : and forth to war will I
And deal with all who dare to threaten me !

JOAB Thy bands, thy heroes, ne'er in better case,
Wait, all impatient, for such summons blown.

BENAIAH

O my good Lord, they famish for the fight !—
Deep-brooding stern Abishaï's white head
Lifts like an eagle's ere the storm-wind wake !

DAVID

O Lips for blood, and Tongues for policy,
Like to a pack of hounds you flick and smack,
And shake my goodness as it were a chain !

JOAB My lord, there's many are not old as we ;
Thy sons are idle, idle in their youth :
'Tis well to rest one's age. But blood is blood,
And war is war, saith Joab ; kings must rule.

DAVID

Thou too art half against me, fierce and old.
Thy brother, taciturn Abishaï,
Glares, with mute eye, full comment on thy text.

JOAB

My lord, being trained to war, we love our trade ;
But thou art king, hast nicer work in hand ;
Pardon our 'prentice-judgments, heed them not.

DAVID

Ah ! Joab, thou wast e'er my friend indeed.
[looking askance at AHITOPHEL, who has walked to
the casement on the left and pretends, peering through,
to be engrossed on things without]
Ahitophel doth overreach himself ;
I cannot bide with such a council's-chief.
Know, sirrah, [AHITOPHEL turns and comes for-
ward.] it is wisdom in old age
To be as gentle as a little child.
To weep tears, as I weep now, is not weak.
To shake at power still, with forceful hands,

Were gluttony : the ground lies strewn with fruit.
How pleasant is it, under Gotham's oaks,
Dismounted from our mules, with women fair
And children noisy like the smaller birds
Sweeping in bevvies near or farther off,
To tune one's harp, and bowered mid tall fern
Picnic secure as girt by garden walls!—
Win smiles, and gratitude, and intimacy!
With trustfulness and frankness these are won,
Not with edged policy and dark deceit.
Oh, it is vicious not to know a change!
To keep one mind forever is not wise!
Life circles through a zodiac of moods,
All comely, and indulgence knows her time;
Leniency drapes the dignity of age.—
Sing now, my soul, for many benefits;
The Lord has blessed thee with an open hand.—
Go, fetch my harp : I made a psalm to-day,
Which I will sing, how weak soe'er my voice!
[ABIATHAR goes for the harp.]

ZADOK

Aye, sing, my lord, in great Jehovah's praise,
And put away the fear of evil men!

[ABIATHAR returns with the harp, which DAVID
tunes while AHITOPHEL again retreats to the lat-
tice, which soon he partially opens.]

DAVID

O Lord my God, what benefits are these!
Behold thou hast set children on my knees!

Thou raisest crenellated ramparts round,
That in my house security be found.

Thou bowest down the heavens now no more;
But retest, while thy worshippers adore.

To deep humility compelled by thee,
Mine enemies from far buy peace of me.

Not trumpets, lutes I hear; the maidens dance,
The young men join them, throwing by the lance.

Tall sons as beautiful as stately deer,
Fair daughters like gazelles secure from fear,
Are met with in the doorways of my house,
Whose walls rejoice to hear when they carouse.

The sword is sheathed; in Zion sleep is safe;
Shields are hung up

I can no more, for it remembers me
The sword, my God hath threatened, shall not pass
From out my house.

[to AHITOPHEL, who turns again from the case-
ment, without, however, leaving it]

Thou workest on my fears;

And, if I lift my face before the Lord,
Wouldst ever throw me down to kiss the dust,
Loving to see me humbled! Enemy
Art thou, and strivest with the grace of God
To me-ward bent. For shame, thou upstart, thou,
Hating thy betters, envious, covetous, lean!
I'll banish thee my court; thy carping face
Makes tasteless all my food. When we are old
We cling to comfort. Yea! and have I none?
The Lord is my sure comfort; being served
As I have served, he will not cast me down.

AHITOPHEL

How wise is age and open to advice!

DAVID At forty men grow testy with the past . . .

AHITOPHEL

At sixty dote and doze o'er former fame . . .

DAVID [continuing]

They chafe to think what fools they were when young .

AHITOPHEL [continuing]

In folly drowning folly grown eye-sore.

DAVID Be careful how thou raise mine ire yet.
AHITOPHEL [throwing the casement wide open]
Thy will is mine; would that thy wisdom were,
O king!

DAVID Then vex me not with woes unborn.

AHITOPHEL

Would that I lived in thy security!
Could feel as happy in my sons; as sure,
That coming years were harvests coming on;
That days advanced like olives waxing ripe,
Or that great God were fond, as man, of rest!
O king, it was excess of zeal that spoke:
And now excess of prudence veils mine eyes,
Which, else, would see a messenger that comes
Rather as those that bring ill news than good,
With wild despairing gesture and shrill cries . . .
See, he throws dust upon his head, my lord!

DAVID

My God, my God! Try thou my heart no more!

MESSENGER [entering and falling on his face]

Lord Absalom hath slain thy sons, my Lord,
And none is left. Ammon these eyes saw fall.

[All arise and rend their garments. The king throws himself on his face to the ground, the rest remain standing with bowed heads, while a great hurrying to and fro fills the court, and a noise of wailing women comes from distant apartments.]

JONADAB [approaching the king]

Not all, my lord the king; suppose not all!

Ammon alone is dead; for Tamar's sake,
Hath Absalom determined this long since.

Take it not with such violence to heart,

For Ammon only Absalom hath slain!

[The young man that keeps the watch enters and draws

JONADAB to the casement near where AHITOPHEL stands to look out.]

JONADAB [turning to the king exclaims from moment to moment]

Behold! look forth and see! the king's sons come:—

For even as thy servant said it is!—

Upon their mules all trotting down the hill!—

Much people with them.—See, the young men live!

Behold they wind beneath yon olive grove!—

My lord, they cross the bridge!—They pass the gate!

Hark! they are in the court.

DAVID [rising] My sons! my sons!—

My Solomon, come fill my loving arms.

[As he descends the stairs towards the courtyard he is seen to embrace SOLOMON, while all the princes and people weep for Ammon.]

AHITOPHEL [who is left alone in the council chamber, moves from the casement]

Ha, thus the young men ride with jingling bells!

So up and down the hilly slopes they ride,

With trembling knees and faces pale, unarmed,—

A train of captive women doleful, dumb;

Or chatt'ring like a harem scared at bath!

I saw them, and the ambling of their mules

That never gallop, pictured me their lives

That amble always up and down the slopes

In turmoil purposeless; like buzzing flies

Put all in panic if a shadow pass;

Their tumult vapid as their pleasures are.

How should such dancing girls prop David's house,

Whose age hath sapped him though he own it not?

Then must we let our poor half-dotard king

Toss Israel's wealth like corn among this swarm

Of fluttery pigeons plumped with dainty fare,

That strut about in pigmy pomp and coo—

Wheel off on whirring wings, if but a child

Clap hands to see their gemmy collars gleam.

Say, is there none of all his sons like him?
 Like in essential mastery, and charm
 That keeps men friendly through his sleeping whiles?
 None who loves stir and the attempt to gain—
 To garner strength and knowledge, proud possession,
 Dominion with extended realm for chance
 Wherein to chase a more abundant game
 With hopes as he with hounds has loved to chase—
 With application not a mule, a steed,
 With quick decisions for his javelins,
 Expertness in affairs for horsemanship
 Admired more through practice day by day?—
 Is not this future apt for Absalom?
 Though he have faults, deficiencies enough:
 Too eager and too little based on fear—
 Not vigilant to miss no least new thing
 That God hath latest done—lets dreams grow rank,
 And, truant in the future, passes by
 The Present with its quiet proffered aid.
 He is not David (not what David was,
 Who sure has run to seed); still he is what,
 I deem, may be relied on to grow great
 And shelter me and give my genius scope.
 If I can only keep him well in hand!
 Could one but trust him, being absent too!
 Were women sure to find quick wits for him—
 Put images to bed, and lie for him,
 Would men but do their murders for his good,
 As Joab Abner; were he wise to dance
 Before the servants on an holiday,
 Or weep for those whose death makes straight his path—
 Though lion-hearted, were he this besides
 I should not clasp my heart that beats too fast;
 I should not ask for signs—not ask for signs!—
 My God, as thou art great, keep me awake

To see what way thou takest. Give me signs
And I will serve thee even as David hath.
[The CURTAIN is lowered.]

ACT II. SCENE I

The roof of Absalom's house. Time, morning. ABSALOM is discovered in a pavilion reclining on a couch and playing with a litter of leopard cubs in a basket. Through the parting of the tent-skirts a trap is visible with stairs leading down into the interior; beyond the parapet the open country.

ABSALOM [speaking to himself]

How this sleek vermin battles with my fist!
Though silken-pawed, as with their marbled dam,
They quarrel with most circumstantial growls,
Till effort warming kindles such good earnest
As, sooth, will sometimes pass the bounds of play,—
When I correct, much as their mother would
Cuffing their heads with velvet paw severe.

This is their school, their lesson how to fight:

And what an ardour have they not to learn,

Teaching each other when none else is by!

For food and slumber only are relaxed

These strenuous ordeals,

By instinct true imposed,—

The pounce from ambush, the escape from grip...

[leaving them and standing up]

In truancy usurp I on their realm,

Forgetting manners, honour and renown,

To outwit lynx, or take the cheetah's part,

When, bounding light across the summer plain,

It brings the soft gazelle, all panting, down.

Else, like a hawk in hood and jesses here

I mope or grow familiar with these cubs.—

Sleep, kitties, sleep; for me a kingdom waits:

I'll hold my head up! thus!

This hair is grown a load;

'Tis time it should be cut.

Yes, yes, a second anniversary

Since Ammon lost his head at feast I gave

Its black and hush descent will put on record.
 What profits me the peril of that deed
 Wond'rously planned and cogitated so?
 Is any increase in pale Tamar's smiles?
 Notes she this eager March out-Aprils April?
 She hath no eyes for flowers, till when they fade:
 Then, they come o'er her. No! all stands the same;
 This fleece will weigh against the stoutest ram's
 As heretofore, and folk will marvel . . . I
 Perhaps get drunk . . . Ahitophel
 Most likely keep away; for, since he's fallen
 Out of my father's grace, he keeps away
 From one still less within that grace, and so
 I chafe, and yawn, and nothing comes of it.
 Joab has proved my friend; in act indeed
 My friend; but not in smiles—in greetings—in
 A civil answer to my messages,
 He's not my friend. Twice has refused to come;
 Though I sent twice, and so am idle still.
 Hope is my drink and fear my nauseous meat;
 I wash one with the other down and starve,
 A dog for hunger, thirsty as the dust.
 [An old and ragged man comes up by the trap, cloaked.]
 Art thou an-hungered? hast thou come to beg
 Of one more famished far, thou grey-beard fool?
 OLD MAN
 Jehovah sends me with his word for thee.
 ABSALOM [folding his arms]
 Despatch his business smartly and begone.
 OLD MAN
 Hark, haughty prince! thus the Eternal saith:
 'I send a worm upon that lazy vine
 Which bears no fruit but smothers up in leaves
 Rank overgrowth flaccid with sap—a worm
 Shall blast green pride. Upon the lion's cub,

That croppeth grass and batteneth on green corn,
An army of lean dogs I send, to bark,
Persist, disturb and rouse his corpulent shame,
Till servants, women, children, everywhere,
Shall laugh to see the lion teased about
By yelping curs; the little quick-eyed boys
Will catch the burden up and bark and bark;
The girls shall bark if they for laughter can;
E'en babes shall turn them from the breast and bark;
The nation grow to seem a single mouth
To bark, and bark, and bark, as I bark now.' [barking]
ABSALOM

But, by Jehovah, ere the tune shall start,
That lion's whelp shall seize that foremost cur,
[bounding upon the old man]
And bear him down, and force him on his knees,
When, even as Samson with the lion, he
Shall prize his jaws so wide, that rain and sun,
Dust, wind and busy ants and flies shall come
Briskly, and enter through that gaping gate;
Then bear the whole contents of his thick hide
Forth to their foreign cities and far homes.
At last when all is clean where all was foul,
Industrious bees shall bear sweet burdens there—
Build up a luscious comb; the which, returned,
And passing once again by that same place,
The lion's whelp shall mightily enjoy;
Barking maybe for very sport, to think
How that cur barked upon that sunny day,
Ahitophel!

[While speaking ABSALOM has forced AHITHOPHEL to the ground, torn off his hood and white goat-skin beard; now as he ends both laugh heartily.]

ABSALOM

Hadst thou, deceiver, been true prophet, I

Had torn thee downward from the jaws in twain.

AHITOPHEL

Yea, my young lord has arms quite strong enough.

ABSALOM

My heart is strong enough : my blood's so hot,
It dances on my temples, bounds and throbs,
Till I am stunned and deadened into dreams
Wherein I grapple giants round the waist,
Or stride down into Egypt with a sword,
And kill, till I am weary, Samson's way,
Then rest me on the heaps that I have slain.

AHITOPHEL

And yet, thou durst not push thy father's door
To claim his pardon for a brother slain
With good excuse and in a natural cause.

ABSALOM

At least I am recalled from banishment;
Though truly God takes time in making kings.

AHITOPHEL

Whose work was that?

ABSALOM Joab's : he sent to plead
Before the king a woman, whose last son
Had slain his brother (so she had been taught.)
Her relatives were all in arms, of course,
To wreak sweet vengeance on her now sole hope,
Since she was widowed. Well, the king, much moved,
Promised her all ; whereon she, opening issue,
Touched him right home.—'This, this is Joab's work'
Cries he ;—'Even as an angel of the Lord art thou
To see what is quite plain, O king,' she smiles :
Straight I was sent for. There, the matter dropped ;
Joab to visit me will not consent

AHITOPHEL

Canst thou not force him?

ABSALOM Yonder, see, his field,
That caps yon ridge and keeps me stivy here ;
Strange irritation blows from thence, a hot

Uncomfortable sense of some one else.
Set fire to yonder barley, I do think,
He'll come to learn the reason.

AHITOPHEL Wherefore wait?

ABSALOM I will catch foxes, turn them tail to tail
And bind a brand between; then watch them, mad,
Disastrous, straggle all about his corn.

'Twill be both sport and business!

AHITOPHEL
Catch foxes?

ABSALOM O Ahitophel, thou hast no love
Of what I'm drunk withal, the sound of things!
There, I'll send servants straight: it shall be done.

ANITOPHEL

So I replace my cloak and get me back
To Giloh gently, having served the Lord.

May'st thou fare well, my lord the prince! [Exit.]

ABSALOM Farewell.

[He claps his hands, SERVANTS come up.]

Dost see von barley that shoots tall and dry?

Go set me brands along its windward edge,

That it may burn and quickly burn away.

SERVANT

My lord, the field is Joab's.

ABSAŁOM Joab's be the loss.

SERVANT

My lord is merry: we have heard him laugh.

ABSALOM

To hear him laugh again set sharp to work.

SERVANT

My lord, great Joab, sure, will have us whipped.

ABSALÖM

Say, I bade you.

SĒRVANT My lord will change his mind.

ABSALOM

Indeed 'my lord' will change his manners too
And tear you as a lion teareth sheep,

Roaring, but not with laughter. Get you gone!
[He threatens them and they go. A silence.]
ABSALOM [drawing back the tent skirts on the right]
There! there, the smoke begins to skim away;
Thin, slant and straight the smart breeze combs it up;
The flame, see, red, brown, purple, almost black,
Eager to singe more bristling beards, leans out;
The great blue noon watches with bated breath.
This hour hugs me! Now I am loved and borne
Shoulder-high toward the future, Joshua,
Moses, Caleb, Joseph, Abraham!
Anxieties cradle me!

Alas, this is indeed
No national crisis, no momentous poise,
Whereon the toppling tribes, in jeopardy,
Demand one hand, nerved steady by a soul
Void of mean cares.

There Joab's servants come
To put all out; they wrangle with my men;
Some run to call their master. Let him come.—
O Joab, how I love thee, fierce old lion!
Joab, arise, come! Joab, quick, thy barley burns!
Joab, ahoy! Ho, Joab; Joab, hither!
The enemy is upon thee, Joab! Hi!
[shouting he leans out over the parapet which is close
against the pavilion on that side.]

JOAB [hurrying up the stairs]
My lord, my lord, what thing is this thou dost,
Unto thy very faithful friend?
ABSALOM [turning round] Ha, ha!
Nay, nay, not on thy knees to me. Well done!
So thou hast come? Mine importunity
Avails at last? Come kiss me, Joab. There!
I'll pay thee for thy barley twice its worth.
For minding thee of David's youth thou lov'st me;
Is it not so, dear Joab? Then reflect,

Think of me banished still my father's face:
 No wars abroad, where prowess might win pardon,
 No way to band four hundred well-armed men
 And out and pillage cities as he used;
 Amalekites keep such respective distance:
 The five Philistian cities pay for peace—
 Peace that is old men's gain, but young men's loss;
 Peace that I love not, sleepy, stale, fat peace.
 Dost thou not rust, good Joab? Ittai
 And all the Gihborim, the men of war,
 Are they not stiff and sour and out of tune?
 Jehovah! Now thou sheddest tears for War!
 Lusty, defamed, notorious, jolly War,
 That's out of fashion but will in again!
 O never fear, when I am king then war
 Will flourish trumpets, shake old banners out
 And march him down to Edom, try his strength;
 Then turn upon Damascus, push as far
 As Tyre—be the wonder of the world!
 JOAB My boy, thou art thy father's worthy son,
 And I will tell him so. He'll call thee back:
 Why, we old men, who have been greatly young,
 Love youth beyond the best of things besides!
 Boy, ne'er forget Jehovah. On thy soul
 Forget not him, but serve thy father's God,
 Who loveth battles, who is Lord of Hosts!
 Be righteous to thine enemies! Make war
 On Edom, ay, and Tyre too; but, boy,
 Be just! beware of promises, ne'er promise peace!
 These promises they bind men up like babes;
 The Lord will none of them. Thy father's old,
 But still he's bound, and might be twice the man
 If 'twere not for these courteous promises.
 They make him rich, but not so rich as Tyre.
 ABSALOM
 Oh, never fear, I'll not be bound to Peace.

Peace is mine enemy, a foolish foe,
That flies when threatened, prays and hopes too much.
The Lord God terrible in battles I
Will love, and worship actively each day.
Come, Joab, thou must stay and dine with me;—
Recount brave deeds,—what chanced at Hachilah,
When David and Abishai went down
By night, and took the spear of sleeping Saul,
His cruse of water likewise, then came back
And raised a cry for Abner, who woke up
Or how ye posted on, from Ziklag burnt,
Three days, three nights behind Amalekites,
And caught them spread abroad on all the earth,
Feasting and drinking, dancing round your spoil.
Ye smote them, did ye not, from twilight even
To twilight, spoiling those that had spoiled you?
Come in, good Joab, I have greedy ears. [Exeunt.]

ACT II. SCENE II.

Jerusalem within the gate. Time, morning. Gateway on the left; adjoining it on the right the judgment seat, roomy, to hold many judges; above, a tower and ramparts against the sky; to the right tall houses divided by a narrow lane, which runs back and up toward the city. Enter, descending from thence, fifty fellows in fine liveries whom Absalom has prepared to run before him; reaching the place by the gate they form in a company, stop, and commence to sing, while the passers-by gradually collect in a crowd:

Our prince is as a summer morning fair,
Sweet ointment shines like dew upon his hair;
All whom he meets turn back, fain after him to stare:
Lord Absalom, whose name
Sets maiden cheeks aflame.

Our prince stands up as, when the day doth break,

Stands, dew-drenched, tall, an oak-tree sure to make
The country shepherds blink, it shines so, when they wake;
Lord Absalom, whose eyes
Fill female hearts with sighs.

His hair is thick and glossy and as black
As raven wings; the line along his back
Curves like a well-shaped bow, whose sounding string is slack:
Lord Absalom, whose skill
Makes Envy's blood stand still.

A lion's whelp he is and very strong,
So swift no road to him seems over long;
And naught he takes in hand doth ever far go wrong:
Lord Absalom, whose soul
To Fear hath ne'er paid toll.

How fair and pleasant Absalom our lord,
Whose speech is now a lute, and now a sword!
He leads the good with gifts, the wicked with a cord:
Lord Absalom, whose ears
Befriend all whom he hears.

Lord Absalom, whose boundless riches give
A third of Judah's host the means to live,
And half your daughters gems to please their suitors with,—
The prince, whom thus we sing,
Shall he not be your king?

[They cease and break into groups.]

THE FIRST OF TWO WOMEN

Oh, what pretty coats! a handsome sort
That wears them too, comely as men are made!
What say you, Leah?

LEAH

Their eyes are always on you, black as crows
That watch to pilfer.

FIRST WOMAN

They're far too plump for thieves!

[to one of the serving men]

Pray you, fair master, let me feel this cloth,

'Tis a sweet fabric.

LEAH

O Mikal, Mikal, consort you not with them!

They are lewd fellows all, these princes' men.

MIKAL [to the serving man as before]

Pray, sir, doth the lord Absalom in truth

Furnish you all these tassels and gold braid?

SERVITOR Ay, every tassel.

MIKAL Lord! keeps he a booth i' th' fair?

SERVITOR

So, Mistress, you are full of guile, I see;

Your fingers are too bold.

[catching and kissing her] Take this, and this.

LEAH

Oh, help her, masters, see! the monster mauls

Her nice clean frock; her hair is coming down!

She is an honest woman, though a blithesome soul,

Not to be treated like your harlotry.

[Enter the husband of the first woman, he seizes the staff dropped by the serving-man and beats him with it.]

SERVITOR [letting the woman go]

Help, comrades, help!

[All Absalom's runners make a set on the husband and drive him about; the crowd laughs, except the two women, who throw dust on their heads, shrieking. Into the midst of the hubbub the prince's chariot drives.]

ABSALOM

I'll have ye hanged on fifty gibbets, fools.

Break peace! ye that were hired to keep it! Shame!

What causes all this tumult and uproar?

LEAH [throwing herself on her face before him]

Pleases my Lord to let his handmaid speak?

ABSALOM

Ay, it will please, I pray thee all the truth.

IEAH

My Lord, I came here with my gossip, Mikal,
That is an honest wife unto Helkiah,
As all our street knows well. She has her ways,
Accosting men like brothers, but is honest.
She much admired your servants' pretty coats:
Would feel the cloth: when he, whose garbs she touched,
Cries loud, 'Thy fingers are too bold,'—(but there!
My Lord, here stood I, nothing farther off
Than thou from me, and as I saw, I speak,
Her fingers had not touched him anywhere,
But barely trespassed on his fine coat's hem,)
Yet straight he clips her round, claps kiss on kiss,
As though she wore no married-woman's dress,
As thou canst see, my Lord, in truth she wears;
Indeed, no man would touch a virgin so;
His was a harlot hug. Up comes Helkiah,
And gives your man his due, with his own staff,
Let drop through haste to have his naughty way
With my dear Mikal. Not a second lost!
Your fifty grooms rush all on poor Helkiah,
Whacking him, as my gracious Lord's self saw:
And this is all the truth, most noble prince.
Oh, they may hem, and interject their 'Oh's!'
I am no liar; ask good Rachel else,
The same is noted for a truthful tongue.

ABSALOM [to the serving man accused]

Rascal, hast thou a word to say?

SERVITOR

My Lord,

Indeed a word, and many words...

ABSALOM

Remove him, sirs, and give him twenty stripes:
One word had been enough, had he been wronged;
For he who needs to spin a tale, is judged.

MANY VOICES [while the serving man is carried by his fellows without the gate]

An angel of the Lord were not more wise.

AN OLD MAN

The fellow hath his lewdness stamped on him.

ABSALOM [to MIKAL]

Good mistress, keep thy fingers from men's clothes :
Who touches lime must bear to be held foul.

OLD MAN [while others laugh]

A just rebuke.

SOME WOMEN

She's paid for being forward :

When will she dare to show her face again?

[HELKIAH pushes his wife off on the right, followed by LEAH.]

ABSALOM [to his runners]

Clear a space, for I will rest me here.—

I think they call this place the judgment seat.

[He sits down on the stone seat within the gate, continuing, to an OLD ISRAELITE.]

Good father, wilt thou not sit down with me?

Nay, be not bashful, here thy fathers sate.

OLD MAN

But, since the king hears causes, sit no more ;

The king is great in judgment, praised be God.

ABSALOM

And yet, mayhap, scant leisure stints the king
Of time to hear.

OLD MAN Too true ! an oracle !

My brother failed of justice, for that cause.

ABSALOM

Indeed, it wounds me for my father's fame :

Come, let me hear thy worthy brother's cause.—

Oh, ye good fathers, who have reverend beards,

Will ye not join us, on the judgment seat,

And help us try to so clear up this case,

That David may be glad to right your friend,
My friend's right worthy brother?

[Some dozen elders with many reverences and protestations, going back, join ABSALOM on the seat and enter into deep consultation, speaking by turns. A POOR MAN enters, coming up through the gate; he addresses one of ABSALOM'S fellows]

POOR MAN

Sir, canst thou tell me, where that fair hall stands
Wherein the king doth judgment?

SERVITOR [pointing out and up, on the right]
That I can;

Yon tower, see it, covered all with shields,
Bright bucklers that belong to mighty men;
Left of that tower but a little stands
King David's hall and palace.

POOR MAN God bless thee,
I make haste.

SERVITOR

Wherefore, father? What's the king

To such as thou?

POOR MAN My friend, I have a cause.

SERVITOR

And thinkest thou the king hath asses' ears
Wherein to purse up every poor man's cause?

POOR MAN Men say, the king is just.

SERVITOR Canst thou pay officers?

POOR MAN How officers?

SERVITOR Why, porters, ushers, eunuchs.

POOR MAN Is justice sold in Israël?

SERVITOR Yea, very dear:

The king grows old, and many rogues grow fat.

POOR MAN

Then am I ruined, if thou speakest true.

SERVITOR Yet here be other judges at the gate;
These reverend sires, behold if they look just.

POOR MAN

But are they strong?

SERVITOR

Why, look at me and these

My fellows!

POOR MAN

Then, God be praised, ye serve these fathers?

SERVITOR

We serve lord Absalom, that sits with them,

As yonder tower in the city's midst;

So beautiful, outshining all he sits.

POOR MAN

Lord Absalom? The king's reported wroth . . .

With him?

SERVITOR

Well, up to Millo, if thou wilt.

POOR MAN

Nay, if I may be heard here, free of charge?

SERVITOR

Come thou before my lord,—

Here's one that's wronged,

My lord.

ABSALOM

Let him speak boldly; judgment's free.

POOR MAN

My lord, I sold my daughter to a man,

Most well to do, near Michmash, where I dwell.

I sold her at a tender age, being poor,

That he might bring her up to be his wife;

Which thing he did, and she grew fair to see,

Was taken to his bed and bore to him

Fine twins; when, lo, he meets a widow, rich

And comely, woos and takes her to himself.

Soon, clothed in rags, my daughter seeks my house,

With hungry children, crying she hath blows

For every word that comes between her lips.

ABSALOM

Hast thou got witnesses will speak to this?

POOR MAN

Yes, there be many willing, but so poor
They may not be at charge to journey hither.

ABSAI'OM

We will at Michmash strict inquiries make;
Then, with these reverend fathers' help, see right
Is measured to the poor as to the rich.
Behold, thou mayst go up into my house
And live well at my charge till all be done.

POOR MAN

Jehovah will reward my lord for this. [Exit.]

A MAN

Of all great David's sons this is the best.

AN ELDER

High hopes rejoice all Israë'l in my lord.

ABSALOM

My father, sirs, is old; pray you be just;
Though not unjustly you complain, unheard
Too often, as it fears me, in just suits.

[JOAB enters through the gate.]

I would make good his slackness all I can.—
O worthy Joab, my most trusty friend,
King David's perfect help and sure right hand,
How shall I ever thank enough that man
Who so re-knit my father's soul to mine?
How close we sit at meat is noised abroad.
Twelve months have proved our loves are spliced quite firm.
So now, behold the people come to me;
Hither they bring his court's large overflow
Of causes still unheard and suits unpled.
I pray thee sometimes, as thy leisure serves,
Aid me achieve these tasks so fallen, unsought,
To novice judgment's proof. Be mine, O thou
My father's shield so long: although, indeed,
I am sequestered from most gross mistakes
By these wise heads, the sires of Israë'l.

[He and JOAB embrace.]

CERTAIN PERSONS

Behold, how dearly Joab loves him too,—

Joab, who is as David's own right hand.

JOAB I will report these precious words, dear son
Of a great father, unto David's ear,
Which will rejoice thereat.[then aside to ABSALOM]

And yet, yet, lad,

Be not too affable; smiles soon breed words,

And idle words grow big with promises,

Which bastards crowd back begging at the pinch,

The wrongest time of all! Be circumspect;

Let others talk; nod thou or shake thy head.

[aloud]

Even now I seek great David to make glad

His soul that faints beneath God's kindnesses,

But is upheld by yet new benefits. [Exit.]

A MAN Indeed I will keep near lord Absalom,
Methinks he is well seen of all the world.

SERVITOR

My lord, here is the prettiest case for law,

A rosy shepherd, with a blushing bride;

Look at these litigants, as fair as flowers

That lean together, being weak of stalk;

Neither could stand alone.

SHEPHERD I can stand

Alone.—Nay, keep thee back, Rebecca;

Fairest of maidens, kneel before the king,

But I will stand up, being brave, and speak.

REBECCA

Nay, my beloved, I tremble and am 'fraid

When my arms cling not round my soul's support;

For all these men are quite unknown to me.

SHEPHERD

How honey-sweet thy voice! O well-beloved,

My tongue grows thick, I am in speech confused,

As one too greedy eating honeycomb.—
Most gracious, excellently noble lord,
High king of Israel, lo! we love each other.
[laughter]

ABSAIOM

So it would seem. What wrong is it ye suffer,
Or rather, as I think, right well support?

SHEPHERD

Why, she is fair as are the stars in heaven!

ABSAIOM Thou sayest true.

SHEPHERD

And I am poor, an almost naked shepherd.

ABSAIOM Again a truth.

SHEPHERD

Gave a man all the substance of his house,
For love it would be utterly contemned:
But rich men always think to buy them love.
My lord, she will not hearken when he speaks,
But turns away and sets her thoughts on me:
Her feet looked lovely in his little shoes;
And yet she buried them behind the wall.
My lord, behold, a lamb is not more soft;
And yet she has been firm as bolted doors.
My lord, he touched her!

ABSAIOM A crime that thou
Art guilty of thyself, I think.

SHEPHERD My lord,
She loves me. Gives my fingers names
(So sweet her fancy primed with winter-tales)
According to the names of kings of old,
Melchizedek, Abram, Enoch, Seth,
Iamech; but Nimrod, sooth, she hunts for him!
The mighty hunter's nowhere to be found . . .
But lo! word follows word like sheep astray;
Not one knows whither!—Loved she not, my lord,
I'd rather die than touch her 'gainst her will,

Or attempt to meet her eyes, or e'en address
One humble word that she were vexed to hear.

ABSALOM

In short you would be married, but some man . . . ?

SHEPHERD

. . . . has bought her from her master for his bed :
Her mother, dead since, was Baal-hanan's slave,
Who sells her, having daughters by his wives.
But she ran straight away at night and came
High on the hills, and hid among my sheep,
Till there I heard her sobbing. Silence lay
So deep o'er all the vales ; so many stars
Did gaze from heaven, that I lay long awake.
Anxious they seemed all gazing down at me,
So that my thoughts grew anxious and I quaked
Lest Nahor should have bought my bride with gold.

REBECCA

Beloved, thou saidst the great king would be old ;
And, lo, this man is young and full of might.

[laughter among the crowd]

SHEPHERD Indeed !

I ever heard it said, that David, now,
Was in decline—who once had been a shepherd,
And therefore did I deem he'd list to me.

[he gazes round in wonder at their mirth.]

Surely, of us you do not make a mock !—

My lord, we are not used to cities.

ABSALOM

Nay

I mock thee not, nor am I yet the king ;
Absalom is my name, who, of his sons,
Stand next the throne : far gone in years of truth
Is that great David, whom thou here didst seek
But have ye nought to charge this Nahor with ?

SHEPHERD

Nothing, my lord, beyond what he would do.

ABSALOM [turning to the elders]
My reverend fathers, what say ye to this?

AN ELDER

My lord, the man remains within his right,
Though he use force, if he has paid her price,
Nor may, with justice, be restrained a jot.

ABSALOM

What sayest thou, Shepherd? Thou must give her up.

REBECCA

Great lord, prince, king, or whatsoe'er thou'rt called,
My heart spake in me as a little child;
We did not have to plan or plot a word;
He always has been thus, so white and ruddy;
He did not ask me, and I did not give—
Thy righteous God hears every word I say.
Not forced, not asked, and seeking no exchange,
The blue-bells lavish scent, they are so glad;
Though sunshine warm them, though the cool dew soothe,
For these they do not dream to pay, my lord!
I am a girl and have no strength at all;
My breasts are yet quite small and hard, dear king;
What can I say! there are no words in me.
My heart is here, to break. It breaks! it breaks!

SHEPHERD

My soul's espoused, close shut them from thy mind!
We will die here together quite alone;
While they throw stones we will forget them even.
Let us sleep now; the time for strife is past;
Four days, four nights, we journeyed hither, south,
And I have never closed mine eyes, till now;
For through thy sleep I watched for lions, bears,
And ravenous men that roam abroad by night.
My only nap was in that good man's wain,
Who drove us past Gilboa down to Dothan.
A WOMAN A cruel law! Their love is beautiful.

ABSALOM

My lad, I like thee; thou art comely grown.
How much may be the sum that Nahor pays? .

SHEPHERD

My lord, he was to give up five hale ewes
And one stout lusty ram, and two great skins
Of his most choicest wine, a mighty price!
But then! but see! how beautiful she is!

ABSALOM

Well, hark, I'll give thee twice that sum to pay;
If thou wilt be my armour-bearer, thou
Mayst marry whom thou wilt: what sayest thou now?

SHEPHERD

My lord, I cannot speak; I'll kiss thy feet.

ABSALOM

Nay, boy, I'll kiss thee, also thy dear bride.
Suffer me that I dock thy thousands, one.

A WOMAN

It is a gracious prince, most fit to rule.

A YOUNG MAN

I'll change from Adonijah's service straight,
And in his household beg for some good place.

A YOUNG WOMAN

[pointing out ABSALOM to her companion]

See, Zillah, how he speaks with aged men
More courteously than suitors come to woo.

ZILLAH

True, Anna; he hath more and lovelier hair
Than any woman I have ever seen.

A SERVING MAN

Say, wouldst thou like to have a lock of it?
Come to our feast of sheep-shearers next month,
For when he polls his head he gives to all,
As many maids as dare to ask of him.

ANNA Oh, I should never dare to meet his eyes.

SERVING MAN

Yes, yes, thou wouldst, and pay a honeyed kiss,
And blush in view of all his feasting friends.

ZILLAH

What, would he kiss me 'fore so many men?

SERVING MAN

Thou sawest how he kissed the shepherdess.

[They go back.]

[AHITOPHEL enters, coming from Millo; he is walking fast, and smiling to himself absorbed.]

ABSALOM [from the back, seeing him pass]

Ahitophel, art bidden to some wedding?

AHITOPHEL

My glad, glad tears did so confuse mine eyes
I did not see thee—walking through this crowd,
Was talking to myself as though alone.

[louder] Oh, I have heard fierce Joab praise a son,
Praise a dear son to his most loving sire!

A woman had not found such rich distress,
Such tears, such stoppings short, and runnings on,
Such breakings forth of platitudes past hope,
As that old grizzled lion short of words.—

Thou wast the tower in Millo. Oh, be sure,
The tower glorious with a thousand shields;
Those shields they were the facets of thy fame,
And so thou wast a jewel: 'Blood is blood
And Joab's Joab,' so needs be a ruby,
A royal ruby flashing through the world
To rouse zest, tempt heart-shaped to enterprise;
So, straight thou wast a trumpet blaring 'War;
But, David sighing, thou wast softened down
Till women flocked about thee like a lute;
Yet wast thou temperate and praised the Lord,
Having more strings than one; and so became
A harp whereon methinks king David longs

To set his fingers now: and all this while
Old Joab stalked about nor could sit down.
[turning to the CROWD who have been listening
open-mouthed] Good folk, we all the men of Israël,
Are blest, how blest! since trouble sheers away
From o'er our heads like thunder-clouds turned back
That came to threaten, which repentance turned,
Because ye did renew allegiance to
Jehovah, Lord of Lords, and King of Kings;
So, now the sky clears—see, yon pigeons rise
From David's house: so may your hopes wing up.
David is old and yet may well last long;
But, whether now he die, or live and reign,
Your peace is bulwarked in this noble prince
Whose just succession dawns nor soon, nor late,
But, granted now in all except the name,
Lightens your eyes and prospers all your fields;
That name he doth not covet, nay, doth pray
It may live long with David, safe in trust.
But 'tis high noon; there is scant shelter here,
So get ye to your homes, whose doors secure
Look never more to hear rude summons at.
[THE PEOPLE as they disperse shout:
Long live lord Absalom, who shall be king!
Which cry coming from divers companies at several
times is so crossed and mixed as that at last some seem
to shout 'Long live king Absalom']
ABSALOM [when the noise has died away]

My ears have heard it:

'Long live king Absalom.' Ahitophel,
Thou art an angel! In paradise I walk.
Adam was not more happy, lord of all;
No serpents will I hear and eat no fruit
Forbidden by dread God; I will do good
Continually, and mend my smallest faults;
Justice my sceptre—courage my crown shall be;

Tyre's wealth shall flood Jerusalem with joy.
Where first begin?—My armour-bearer, ho!
What is thy name, boy?

SHEPHERD Lemuël, my lord.

ABSALOM

Dost see these fifty fellows, Lemuël?
I make thee lord of them. Thou hast kept sheep;
It is my pleasure thou shouldst shepherd these.
Art thou afraid?

LEMUEL Not much of them, my lord.

ABSALOM

Thou tremblest, boy; I think, thou art afraid,
And of them too; see, how they edge about
And shuffle round thy girl.

LEMUEL My lord, a man
From Heleph came to steal; I fought with him
Up by the lonely fold, and, in the dark
I tripped him up and knelt upon him down,
Thrashing with leather sling until he roared;
For so the Lord made my heart brave to do,
That God whose might to David stooped Goliath.
And with his help could I thrash one of these.

ABSALOM

One, but thou tremblest at them all?

LEMUEL My Lord,

I am a lad, these men are city bred.
I of their manners little know—would learn
Somewhat before I take so great command.

ABSALOM

Out on thee, boy! it is the soul commands!
Thou art not great of heart. Go, lead these home;
And if they misbehave, pray to have wit
At least to hide thy fears.—Obey him, sirs.

[Exeunt LEMUEL and RUNNERS.]

[to AHITOPHEL]

My blood is greater and rebels not in me;

t

He is stamped out; I turn to foreign foes;
There are no near ones left can match a king.

AHITOPHEL

My lord, though I have been thy friend till now,
I dare not trust me farther in thy cause:

I am afraid.

ABSALOM Ahitophel! what next?

AHITOPHEL

O my good lord, thy brothers live all round;
Jerusalem is not the utmost world.

This joyful day will breed more foes than friends;

Aroused thus all the princes will, forthwith,

Commence to countermine. I fear to speak,

For walls have ears! This is a dawn, my lord,

Must blush far redder ere it will be day,

And even then may not be sure to shine.

While time allows, curb in that bounding spirit.

At Hebron have I many faithful friends;

Judah is not too pleased that David, whom

They chiefly raised to power, should hold them now

But one of twelve good tribes; this jealousy

Already have I warmed: make some excuse,

A vow to pay or what may give pretext

To expend good cheer, and shortly come to Hebron.

Thy annual feasts have pleased the country folk;

We will send embassies to all the tribes,

Advising such as hold themselves for wisest,

How likely is a change on times long quiet,—

How that such number in a king's sons doth

Imperil peace; while the succession hangs,

A thing for the decision of a day

That nears, and should make anxious men of sense.

These gentle spies shall, last, drop hint of—Yea,

But not discover this good remedy.

By fifty fools arrived at fifty times

'T will more convince than Urim—namely this,

That thou be crowned before the old king die.
And we may count on all who beg us join
In our own plot: they will be there, what day
Our trumpets blare in Hebron. Think of this.
A week or even two thou mayest sit here;
Ingratiate thyself with simple folk;
But ere commotion gathers to a head
Thou must remove, and give thy brothers room
To spend their spleen in words that beat the air.
At Hebron put thou on the judge once more.
Thy brothers will not heed the thing so much,
Deeming thy flight concession to their powers.
In time to soothe their young alarms take wing
And come to Hebron. So farewell, my lord;
That we work singly will a colour lend
Of plain intentions. So, farewell, my lord;
My mule awaits me just beyond the Gate. [Exit.]
ABSALOM

This place turns round; the sun is over hot;
Dizzy am I: a taste makes dry my mouth:
But I will do his bidding; he is wise.
[The CURTAIN drops.]

ACT II. SCENE III.

The ford of Kidron occupies the front of the stage, so that those on the right are on the Jerusalem side, but those on the left stand at the foot of Olivet, which occupies the background, and round which the brook winds to disappear; the road mounts Olivet from the extreme left towards the right, where it is seen to pass beyond the brow; beyond which again is a far steeper hill whereon is seen a rugged goat-path. BENAIAH leading the Cherethites and Pelethites enters on the right, crosses the ford, and mounts the hill, over which they all disappear. Meanwhile many families, coming the same way, are straggled up the hill or crossing the

ford, with mules and slaves and baggage. DAVID, riding a mule, enters on the right, and by his side JOAB, ABISHAI, ITTAI the Gittite, and other captains on foot.

DAVID [stopping his mule, to ITTAI]

No farther, Ittai,

No farther; get thee back;

Why shouldst thou also toil with us? Return,

And keep thine office near this younger king.

Since thou, a stranger, art not one of us,

Seek thou king Absalom whose fortunes rise—

Who has been crowned in Hebron. All the tribes

Avow them his; young men by nature do,

And old men feelingly mistrust old age.

Dost thou not serve for fortune? Mine is lost;

If thou but yesterday hadst come to me,

Should I this day make thee go up and down?

And what are three parts of a life to blood?

Blood is the bond, and even blood is loose.

Behind thee profit lies: fly not thy good,

Seeing I go not any whither now;

My destination doth not crown this hill,

Nor yet the next; but whither I may, I go.

Take back thy brethren then. Mercy and Truth

Be with thee, Ittai.

ITTAI As the Lord

Liveth, and as my lord the king liveth,

In whate'er place my lord the king shall be

Whether in death or life, in that place also,

Thy servant, Ittai, shall be.

DAVID [to ITTAI, who leads his band of fifty Gittites
over the ford, followed by their families]

Then go;

Pass over, Ittai, thou and thy friends,

Thy women, and thy little ones. Pass on.—

Ye weep, my friends, and all my people weep,

But I not yet, knowing no cause to weep :
For that my son inherits me is well ;
After the father should the son be king :
That youth is hasty hath been known of old.
My care is only this, to save your lives.
[to ZADOK, who enters on the right with ABIA-
THAR]

What ! hast thou come, good Zadok ? What is that,
Thy holy Levites carry with such care ?
The ark ? Oh, no ! Disturb not great God's ark,
Nor bring it into danger, where ill deeds
Do drive us. Take it back : my son may need
To feel the Lord with him yet more than I ;
But, if the Lord doth truly favour me,
He will then bring me back and show me both
His holy habitation and his ark,
So blessed once more. But in the case he say
'I have no longer joy in David,' why !
Here am I ; let him do as seemeth good
To him, for surely I am in his hand.
And Zadok, art thou not a seer ? In peace
Return, and fear no violence ; men will
Respect thee yet ; that holy title wards
Thine aged bosom better than our spears.
Good holy men, take your two sons with you,
Ahimaaz thy son and Jonathan
(That name is sweet with memories for me)
The son of good Abiathar—and mark :
I do intend to tarry in the plain
Skirting the wilderness, until there come
Tidings from you to certify what falls ;
Your lads must bring them—for my hot-head son
Lacks counsel, tastes new wine ; with likelihood
All ends well yet : if he drink deep enough
And let his eager haste undo his strength
(He has not with him one experienced friend)

We'll catch him in a noose and let him prance
Till, wearied out, he falls, and then correct him.—
I would I saw Ahitophel here now!

ZADOK

My lord the king has spoken very well;
And, though I fain would stay to comfort here,
I bear the ark away; nor deem bereft
Of comfort and support thy cause, my king.—
A right mind is an ark, the which our God
Has consecrated to contain his wealth;
Cherubs no less do shelter it with wings:
The minds of fools must ever lack a lid,
Or have such covers as slam in the wind,
Unhinged, unfastened. Keep, keep ye secret still
Your treasure, O ye sons of Israël;
Pry not therein, as they of Kirjath-jearim;
Still less reveal to impious foreign eyes
(As happened when in battle lost the ark
Brought down stone Dagon all except his stump,
And plagued the Philistines): then ne'er reveal
The secrets of thy nation or thy breast;
Keep them for ever! Jehovah long has loved,
Nor is he fickle, or of little might,
But brought you up from Egypt: fear and serve him.
And so farewell.

ALL THE PEOPLE

God save his people, Israël.

[ZADOK turns and goes out. DAVID slowly crosses the ford, when a man running on from the right catches him up on the further bank.]

MESSENGER

My lord, Ahitophel of Giloh's turned,
And is with Absalom to counsel him.

DAVID O Lord my God, I pray to foolishness
Turn thou the counsel of Ahitophel!

Most awful God, be even with this traitor,

Thou only canst.—

O Policy, O Cunning,
Have I then treated with thee for thy love
As with a little child, e'en smiled on Cunning?
Took I a step beyond these times in hope?
Have I leaned from my poor ill-built past
As from a tower-top, and leaned too far,
Fain of the arms of angels passing on
Winged for a later time and better men;
And falling do I drag those ill-squared deeds
About mine ears in ruin to the ground?
Punished indeed, condemned to death not yet.—
I will not ride but slowly walk; 'tis meet

In those condemned. I will not lead the way,
But be the last, the almost-left-behind,
That best would please indeed by being lost.
[The others leading the mule begin to ascend the hill,
except JOAB, who waits by DAVID'S side.]

The Lord hath brought his prophecies to pass;
The sword is naked in my house once more.

Help me remove my shoes; these stones are rough.

JOAB The better reason for stout soles, my lord.

DAVID Not so, good Joab; help me as I say.

JOAB My lord, thy wits do wander; 'tis the sun
That rides the ridge of noon; on thy great grief

His heat prevails, as 'neath a caldron coals,

Till it give off a steam that mists thy sense.

DAVID Joab, had I said, 'Seest thou yonder goat?

Go cut its throat, and sprinkle this my path'

It had been done by now; but since I say,

'Help me unlace this sandal,' I am mad.

JOAB My lord, I do not understand thy words,
And so suppose they wander from true sense.

DAVID

Though Saul was mad, yet Abner served him well.

JOAB My brother and thy servants wait, my lord.

Shall we not catch them up?

DAVID [rising bare-foot] Man, beware;
I asked thee for a simple kindness. Thou
Refusedst it; though I were mad, 't were one.
I fear thee as I feared Ahitophel;
Thou think'st to read my mind better than I,
As he beheld my profit in a course
Eschewed of my best pondered purposes.
Pride is not power nor haste speed. Though I
Walk humbled, lame, man, what is that to thee?
These aged feet, that brave the brunt of shocks
From cruel stones, speak louder to the Lord
Than all thy savage deeds. O Joab, Joab,
I am afraid of God and lack all surety
Of favour from on high: then I do well
To foot it humbly with a contrite heart.
Shall I, who have so served the Lord so long,
And yet who have so justly angered him,
Pretend to confidence or cast my service now
And bow to Baäl, since I am not paid
For my good tender first, but things ill done
Bear down his anger? Nay, if he see this,
Bethinking him again of all my best,
He will forgive me; as I Absalom,
Did he forsake his froward pride, would e'en
Forgive. There is no profit in revenge
Either for God or man. But to compel
A rebel to repent, make enemies good friends,
Bad servants anxious to do well—in these
Who is so blind as not to spy advantage?
Then think not ill of me, still less of God,
But love me, Joab, and love God; and I
Hold thee heart-bound for ever.

JOAB Good my lord,
Thou dost see far into the ways of God:
Methinks revenge is sweet to aged men;

God is from aye and vengeance proper to him.
When I was young I let the vanquished live,
Thinking to gain more glory later on
From his renewed defeat. But now I think
Next year I may be weaker just so much,
And with contentment watch him agonise:
His death doth pledge me safety that amount.
Yet I am blind; lead me who stumble else.
'Twas ever thus in all our escapades
And blood-embued adventures; what I thought
Did prove but foolish by thy counsel's side.
But, see, thy friend good Hushai draweth near,
His coat is rent, there's earth upon his head!
[during the above HUSHAI has entered from over
the brow.]

DAVID Joab, thy soul preferreth Absalom
Unto his father won away by peace;
A warrior is he after thine own heart.

JOAB [kneeling]

Upon my knees, my lord, the past doth live—
Doth shake my whole soul as no new thing can.
I have seen David's deeds unmatchable,
Since when his name was novel on men's lips;
And envy, every day of all those years,
With love hath striven, and love borne off the palm.
Why should I prize this locust clad in mail,
Born yesterday and doomed to die to-morrow?

DAVID O Joab, Joab, do not say to-morrow.
His death and mine, each critical for each,
Are yoked; his life and mine far-sundered stray:
Slaying me, why, he were but dead, I think;
The Lord, whose vengeance is, must needs avenge
A father's blood: and if he die, I die.

HUSHAI [who has come down the hill from the brow]
My lord, dost thou not see thy friend, or is
Thy grief too great?—Most lamentable tears,

Why rush ye thus to David's royal eyes
Now when he sees me, being absent erst?

DAVID

Good Hushai, friend, well known, well seen, art thou ;
My tearful eyes protest not 'gainst thy face,
Which long loved is loved yet, but they protest
Against a heart divided in itself ;
Even my heart that, old, is reft in twain.
Good Hushai, thou that art a peaceful man,
Art noway useful in the bucklered ranks ;
Since thou, like Isaac, hast been blessed through peace,
At my side, who have been a man of blood,
Thou wilt but be a burden : mine intent
Being to shed more blood, my forced intent,
Alas !

But Absalom hath need of one like thee.
Say thus : 'As I have been thy father's servant, I
Will be thy servant also now, O king.'
Then mayest thou defeat Ahitophel,
Who is the enemy whom most I fear :
Dissuade from all his plans whate'er they be ;
Comfort my son in vanity ; gain time ;
Vaunt distant feats o'er deeds immediate ;
And, sanguine of events, advise smooth things,
Cheerful, zealous, plausible.—Hast thou not there
Zadok, also Abiathar, the priests ?
Therefore, whate'er thou at the king's house learn'st,
Thou shalt impart to them, who privily
Will unto me dispatch their light-foot sons.
Thus Absalom, my son, may be chastised,
But spared unto mine age. It should be tried :
The Lord is very watchful how we walk.

HUSHAI Even as an angel of the Lord, my lord
Shall be obeyed. [He starts down the hill.]

DAVID God prosper thy smooth tongue.
[While slowly attaining the brow of the hill, where

ABISHAI and the other captains have waited, he constantly gazes after HUSHAI, who crosses the ford and goes off on the right: saying with frequent breaks] A simple soul, the safest noose for guile.

Dear good old man, so open in his age,
Most full of words; I've hugged myself with laughter
To hear him run on, many a time: indeed,
A babbling babe stocked with an old wife's tales;
Inconsequent to all save what's last said,
His anecdotes drift in the breath of chat.
He is like snow, a white and gentle comer.
Simplicity is very near to God.

Ahitophel will sink through this fair trap
As did the lion in Benaiah's pit,—
Who dug deep down, what time the gentle snow
Fell softly, rested well on light twigg'd wands
As on firm earth, and had a simple look,
So that the lion doubted not at all.
This guileless soul will seem the unlikeliest spy,
And put a smooth face on the pit of death,
Wherein my enemy will, presently,
Cry loud.—Great God, I thank thee for this sign.
[ZIBA appears on the brow from the other side.]

DAVID [looking over towards the right]
What do yon asses there? They stop my folk
In yonder bottom.

ZIBA [prostrating himself]
My lord, the asses are
To carry all the household of the king.

DAVID
Servant of Saul, where is thy master's son?

ZIBA He tarries at Jerusalem, my lord.

DAVID He tarries?

ZIBA He abides, my lord, in truth.

DAVID All that was Merib-baäl's now is thine.
This Merib-baäl, halt Mephibosheth,

ACT III. SCENE I

David's Palace. Time, afternoon. A room on a lower level and divided from the council-hall by wooden columns; between the two centre of these four or five steps lead up. On either side of this stair are divans which run along the base of a trellis forming a balustrade between the columns of the hall above, from which a half light penetrates to the inner room. A curtain is drawn at the top of the steps: cushions and shawls litter the divans.

A CONCUBINE [entering from the right]

I have been down into the limpid bath;
The water was quite still; the walls of stone
Kept silence; I nor splashed, nor laughed, nor swam,
But listened to my heart: at last it seemed,
My heart did speak with words that broken said,
'Wast thou not once a child?' Then I felt old,
Older than what I am, and reached the side
And sat me there and wept; for I was sad.—
An empty palace is a mournful place!

[She goes out by the opposite door.]

A SECOND CONCUBINE [entering from the left]

I have been listening by the closet doors
And fast locked chests. The precious stones had heard
My soft approach and they were silent all;
The diamonds and rubies did not talk;
The green-eyed emeralds laughed for wickedness,
To think how I was listening all in vain;
But limpid topazes have never tongues,
Searched easily through and through; their silence lives
And weighs no jot on them; 't is like a song
Whose words the singer heeds not, being too glad.
I have heard tell how wise are amethysts
To find hid treasure, changing colour straight.
Some stone there is that doth discover crimes;
Another, sullen, tests virginity.—

'Tis lonely here; I'll seek the others out.

[She goes out on the right.]

[Two CONCUBINES enter meeting, severally:

Ruth!

Merab dear!]

MERAB Let us keep company.

RUTH Shall we be slain by this king Absalom?

We are too old to please so young a man.

MERAB

Not all so old; besides we are well kept.

I have been dressing at Bath-sheba's mirror

And used her ointments. Smell! Is it not rare?

I came no sweeter into David's arms,

A virgin having just my thirteen years:

His heart was glad thereat.—This is her comb.

RUTH

See here this undervest—'tis a choice cloth

And has been charmed against untoward things,

Chiefly, I think, 'gainst snakes; but it scares fleas:

'Tis Abigail's, who was a rich man's wife;

'Twas hers before she came to David's bed.

MERAB

It is a treasure. Let's to the kitchens now.

[They go out together; after a little another CONCU-
BINE enters, but, hearing a distant noise, runs across
the stage and off; presently three CONCUBINES
enter excitedly.]

SIXTH They come, a sea of people!

SEVENTH Hark, their trumpets!

EIGHTH This son of David is a glorious man!

SIXTH What shall we do?

EIGHTH Oh, let us hide ourselves!

SEVENTH

Nay, that were foolish; rather make us fair,

So shall we be entreated well of men;

Come, let us find adornments quickly, veils,

Bright girdles, bracelets, shawls and quilted slippers:
We may be queens to-day.

[They go out: LEMUEL with his crowd of porters
fills the council-chamber above.]

LEMUEL

Brisk, fellows, sharp! set up these o'er-turned seats.—
You, help me drape this dais.

[after a few minutes] Not so much noise.

[One of them comes through the curtain, LEMUEL
following.] Sir, stay you there.

[thrusting him back, then turning himself he looks
about] This is a queen's apartment, sweet with musk;
Here will I bring Rebecca, my beloved;
She shall be queen and on plump cushions sit
And warm her hands at fretted cassolettes
When evening damps strike chill.

[He returns to the hubbub in the next room, and in a
little while re-enters with his bride.]

Rebecca, see, this cushion's blue as Heaven,
Thereon shalt thou be star; but, yet, methinks
Thou wert a lily on this lovely green,
Might tempt an angel risk his throne to tend thee;
So sit thou here. I must be quick away!—
This crimson is most sumptuous; thou wouldst lie
On this, a cherub on a western cloud!—
But I must get me back; those fellows quarrel;—
Yet first will drape this silken shawl o'er thee,
That thou mayest look like Abram's royal tent,
Pitched in Beersheba, holding far more wealth
Than in the citadels of neighbouring kings
Could well be found; the Lord so blessed him there.—
But what a din! indeed, I should be gone.—
One kiss, Rebecca, mine, not Isaac's wife;
Another; 't is to last maybe for hours.—
The trumpets! hark! I shall be whipped for this,
So make it healing for the stripes 't will cost.—

Make it all balm and myrrh and frankincense,
A posset for a king.—Trumpets, too harsh,
Here is my lute that conquers all my will

REBECCA

Lemuël, make haste; thy lord will whip thee else;
Leave me, leave me!

LEMUEL

Cruel Rebecca, wouldst thou be alone?

REBECCA

O Lemuel, thou mak'st me weep for thee;
Hark, they are in the court, thou wilt earn stripes;
Too costly! these kisses seem to savour tears.

LEMUEL

Think of my love and lonely wear a smile.

[He runs out; a little later all the ten CONCUBINES
enter at once.]

SECOND

Didst thou behold him riding his proud horse?

MERAB

Of course, of course; we all beheld the king.

EIGHTH

His hair hung round his waist in one vast cape.

RUTH Ye handmaids of the king, say, who is this,
That sits beside the trellis looking through?

[REBECCA turns her head quickly and back again.]

FIRST

She's timid as a little girl from home.

EIGHT

She is some concubine of this new king's.

RUTH And passing fair.

MERAB Indeed! I like her not.

SEVENTH

Surely, a concubine were not so shy:

She hath a virgin air.

MERAB

Go pull her shawl back that we see her face.

It fears me she might cry and some one hear.

Thou needst not hurt her; there, see, gently! oh,
What blushes!

[She has pulled REBECCA'S shawl aside, who hastily replaces it, and turns once more to the trellis. The train of ABSALOM have by this time filled the council-chamber, where a confusion of voices still prevails.]

Who art thou, maiden, and to whom belongest?

REBECCA O daughters of Jerusalem, I am
Good Lemuël's wedded wife.

And who is he?

REBECCA O daughters of Jerusalem, he is
An armour-bearer to king Absalom.

Nay, let us watch them, in the council-hall ;
Already are they seated : leave this girl.

[Collecting at the trellis on the opposite side of the door to that on which REBECCA sits, they peer through.]

ABSALOM [who has taken a seat on the right, just above REBECCA]

The Lord hath shown his pleasure, I am king;

Our heralds are sent forth, we wax apace;

Each minute brings its man, and every hour

Is marked by the arrival of a band; the watch

Is set and quarters served, appointments dealt

To officers, while calm our first day ends.

My father fell in years; much wrong was done,

Not chargeable upon so great an age,

But perilous no less to Jacob's seed:

In peace eschewing bloodshed am I risen.

We had not thought to affright these aged men;

Their flight has changed the aspect of our act,

But not its nature. Still we love them well

And, grieved at misconception, must pursue
And make them prisoners, that they never be
A cause of faction, but die loved in peace.

HUSHAI [who appears on the left between the columns of the hall] God save the King!

ALL THE PEOPLE God save king Absalom!

ABSAIOM

Is this thy kindness to thy friend? too quick,

O Hushai! Nay, for those who loved him so

I did not yet expect to come to me.

Why wentest thou not with thine aged friend?

HUSHAI

Nay, whom the Lord, this people and the men

Of Israël have chosen, his I am; with him

My heart abides. Again, whom should I serve?

Should he not wait in presence of the son,

Who in the father's presence came and went?

So will I in thy palace, my sweet lord.

ABSAIOM

Thou art a wise man, surely, white as snow;

I have not many so experienced heads;

So thou shalt sit next to Ahitophel,

In counsel being heard next after him,

The guide of my young feet until this hour;

Which but for him had scarcely prospered so.

AHITOPHEL [rising between columns on the left,
but close to the centre curtain]

O king, the God of Israel, not I,

Did this. He gave me wisdom all I have:

And, now, not looking here, I look to him,

Asking that counsel which I am to give.—

Thou art a king; yet issue?—none is thine.

But thou hast raised a pillar to thy name.

None is too few; too plenteous David's was,

Thine fails for want. I gather from good friends

(Such have I found in nearly all men met

For whom I bless Jehovah, Lord of Hosts)
 That David left within ten concubines
 To air the rooms and dust the furniture
 And give alarm against chance pilferers:
 The Lord might bless my lord in one of these
 Ah, start not thus as from a deed abhorred!
 'Ahitophel is wise,' full oft thou sayest;
 Then do believe that wisdom solely points
 To plain smooth paths of safety—views no end
 But blessed prosperity. The old weak king
 Must by his flight outlaw thine act and thee
 By just so much as his success makes plain
 The will of God; then he must not succeed,
 Nor will he; hast thou never understood
 How that Jehovah will not be half-served
 But doth demand his utmost from each man?
 Did not Saul palter, was not Eli found
 Too fond a father to be just as judge?
 Yet Eli was an old and reverend man.
 Nathless God stayed not for what honoured him,
 The past, but for faults senile brake his neck.
 Save thou thy father from so sad a fate.
 O tempt him not, by letting his hopes grow,
 To cling to powers now far beyond his strength,
 And which the Lord delivers unto thee
 That thou in turn may'st serve him in men's view!
 Shouldst thou permit those labouring in mistake,
 As David and his friends do labour now,
 To wax in number, all will join with them:
 For fast increasing doth beget increase,
 Man moves with man. Thy father's very wise,
 Will profit even by his son's success;
 Be ours to equal him in policy.
 Doubtless he prompts men: 'I have loved this son;
 Shall I not pardon now, and with him those
 He leads astray?' there stops; and such as doubt,

Think this is how the upset will fall square,
 As both do love the other; joining David
 As willingly as thee, since all is one,
 Not mindful whose the future is, nor who
 Has numbers, all indifferent to signs.
 More brave behind the Cherethites such feel,
 And trust themselves among the Pelethites,
 Step out, led on by famed Abishaï,
 Find confidence in seeing Joab busy,
 Feel very lucky near the Gibborim,
 Holding the Gittites dearer than their kin :
 With gay glib tongues they noisesuch thoughts abroad,
 In conversation plume themselves for seers.
 Then will your friends perchance give ear to them
 And fall away. But if men say of thee,
 'His father doth abhor him; know ye not,
 He lay with his own father's concubines?'
 Then shall division, strictlier defined
 Between ye, leave him weakest far; then shall
 The hands of all that are with thee be strong.

ABSALOM

Ahitophel, thy words reveal the truth;
 Affection in my heart had overlaid
 My father's dark unfathomable mind;
 Doubtless, as thou hast seen, he founds deep hopes.—
 Then spread a tent upon the roof for me,
 That in the sight of gathered Israël
 I may do this, and clinch their minds with proof.—
 Go find these concubines and bring them there,
 When I shall go above. Stay yet a while,
 For Hushai would speak too.—What canst thou say?

HUSHAI [rising between the columns on the extreme left] Oh, listen never to such wickedness!
 The heathen even rarely do such things;
 Although a man in Askelon, they say—
 But never mind, abominable was he,

And shall be ever held; for he was cursed,
By mad dog bit some summers later on;—
They say the child is now a slave in Tyre.
My lord, my lord, I know not what to say.

ABSALOM

Good man, why, so it seems! Hushai, we laugh!
Ahitophel is wiser far than thou.

I will have all the dogs in Israël killed,
If thou hast truly fear some chance mad hound,
Some summers later on . . . there's time enough!

HUSHAI This laughter hath an evil ring, my Lord,
To-day with gay, to-morrow rhymes with sorrow.

ABSALOM [mocking him]

The young rejoice; the aged curse the noise.
Thou hast learned David's pastime, silly rhyme.—

Lemuël, begone and do as I have said.

LEMUEL [with two or three PORTERS comes
through the curtain: then turning back]

My lord, the women are all listening here.

ABSALOM

'Tis well, make haste and spread a sumptuous tent.

Maybe the Lord will grant me issue now;

Success with generous warmth elates my blood.

MERAB I pray thee, sir, let me the first go up.

SEVENTH Nay, let me be the first.

EIGHTH 'Tis mine by right;

FIFTH I am the youngest far.

LEMUEL

Shame on ye, women! are ye all so bad?

MERAB

Nay, sir, I pray thee take this necklace, sir;

The beads are gold of Ophir; 'tis of price,

And would look fair upon thy fair bride's neck.

REBECCA [to LEMUEL, who hesitates]

O Lemuël, turn thine eyes from wanton eyes;

Think not of gold; thine arms my necklace are.

LEMUEL.

Let us go up and spread the tent at once,
Not waste the time with women here.

RUTH

Good sir,

Allow me lead the way; I'll show thee where
The tents are kept, beds, pillows, sheets, ropes; come!
[She leads LEMUEL and his MEN out on the right.]

MERAB [who has crossed close to REBECCA]

There, take thou that, for moving 'gainst my suit.

[REBECCA gives a little cry.]

MERAB Ha, ha, the pin is poisoned, little fool!

[returning to the others while REBECCA begins to
sob under her shawl]

Thou well mayest weep against thy burial.

ABSALOM [his voice making itself heard from the
upper room] Again thou sayest true, Ahitophel;

I have no captain like Abishai;

None equals Joab here, Benaiah none—no troop

Have I like Ittai's famed band; still less

Have thirty Gibborim. My hopes rushed on

Too fast.

AHITOPHEL

My lord, not fast enough.

ABSALOM

How so?

AHITOPHEL

I should be posting even now, with all

Thy bravest friends, and nearing on their flight;

So coming suddenly among their rout,

One blow, struck as it were by accident,

Might bring thee Joab and Abishai,

And Ittai with all his famous band,

And Gibborim no less than thirty captains

Doughty in battle.

ABSALOM

What! Should David fall?

AHITOPHEL

Joab slew Abner basely:

David had sunk the house of Saul in blood

Ere his throne felt secure;
Yet God both pardoned him and blessed his reign.
Should David fall, thou wert securely king.
God will not be half-served: he did demand
Of Abraham when old his only son.
'Thy father's days to come can be a loss
By no means of such magnitude: besides,
Some miracle—a goat caught in a thicket!—
May save him from God's judgment, yea, prevent
That he like Eli fall from off his throne
Struck down by him he served so long and well,
Because he, being judge, yet proved remiss
When fond paternity pled for those two,
Hophni and Phinehas, sons of Belial.
Not Ammon only David's weakness spares,
But all the stiff-necked count him their fond sire
Whose mildness doth beget their confidence.
I pray my lord's permission to set out.

ABSAI.OM

Oh, not so fast; I have not thought of this.

Let me hear Hushai; for he may be wise.

HUSHAI O king, thy father is a mighty man,
And Joab and Abishai like lions;
And as a bear robbed of her whelps, in mind
So be they chafed, and moody prowl apart.
They, being men of war, will never lodge
Pell-mell with folk and baggage. When we met,
He said he would not have me go with him;—
For I did offer first, O king, to him,
Mindful how deep I stood in benefits;—
He scowled, I should but burden his designs;
For he will not be burdened with much folk!
Behold he is, by this, hid in some pit
Or in some other place, Adullam's match,
Engedi's parallel: and it will be
Then, when Ahitophel and his brave friends

Have slain some slaves or women of the rout
And are disordered, he will out on them;
If thus some few are overthrown at first,
'Twill come to pass that all who hear of it
Will say, 'There is a slaughter 'mong the folk
Of Absalom;' then, he, the valiant, also,
Whose heart is like a lion, utterly
Shall melt to hear it: for all Israël knows
Thy father is a doughty man and they
That follow with him all are mighty men.
Therefore I counsel that all Jacob's tribes
Be generally gathered unto thee,
From Dan even to Beersheba as the sand
That is by the sea-side for multitude;
And that thou go to battle like a King,
In thine own person. We shall come on him
Then in some place, wherever he be found,
And light upon him as the dew that falleth,
Even so universally on all the ground;
Then shall of him and all the men with him
Be nowhere found so much as one, O king:
Thou shalt have blood and booty, prisoners or
Most contrite foes for friends, at choice, great king.
Moreover, if he be got to a city,
Then shall the tribes bring to that city ropes
And we will drag it down into some river,
Until there be not one small stone found there.

ABSALOM

Ay, even so; then will I march on Tyre;
Leading that host, victorious to the last,
Trample all Egypt like a threshing floor:
I will set sons to reign in Sheba; yea,
In Saba's self my son shall wear a crown;
The isles shall send their wealth in ships to me;
And every man of Israël seem a prince
So lordly his attire, so rich his house.—

This counsel doth surpass Ahitophel's.

MANY VOICES

Indeed it pleases all who hear, O king.

AHITOPHEL

[drawing back the curtain and coming through]

My lord, look in on mighty David's house,

It is all dark and not half finished yet:

The wind moans through its storeys, swings its doors;

I hear king Hiram's builders—David's foot!

Hark, on the roof he paces to and fro;

He watches them, impatiently, at work;

His house must stand for generations; yet

'Tis but half built . . . Listen, my lord, he walks!

ABSALOM

Why, that is Lemuel's foot! Ahitophel

Is put beside himself to be o'er-ruled,

And like a girl is sudden in device

To win attention from her rival back;

Sees ghosts, or faints, or cries 'An asp! an asp!'

RUTH [returns carrying a flagon of wine and crosses the stage to the kitchens]

AHITOPHEL [turning towards Absalom]

Wisdom is like a girl, a little child,

A patient ass, a docile lamb; she has

No proper face but looks through many eyes;

And standing here, O king, my wisdom faints

And, dizzy, holds these posts in fear to fall,

Like to a woman taken with her pains,

Or like a girl who learns she is betrayed;

Or as great Samson suffering in the dark,

Hearing a careless laughter, fed on him,

Jibe and grow loud—grapples the props of hopes

Doomed to fall in on those who raised them up.

This, David's house, is thine to roof and prop;

Buttress it well, cement it, even with blood;

If it shall last, blood must, indeed, be shed

For favour from the everlasting God,
That he permit encroachment on those titles
His only to the end. As Abraham did,
Far gone in years, offer his only son,
To make more sure the promise to his seed,
That it should last for ever even as God;—
Feed thou the roots of promise in this house
With a like precious dew, which then shall stand
For ever and for ever in its place.
'The sword shall never pass from out this house,'
So runs the prophecy which first claims his,
The founder's—or for what art thou outlawed?
He knows his weakness—would not fly thee thus
But that his grave draws him despite his will.
How could he more provoke calamity?
Look narrowly! Observe, God, latterly,
Has lavished obvious signs! Do thou obey—
And know it is not I who will despair,
Since, as for Abraham, a miracle
May show thee then some innocent escape,
Like to a kid caught in a bramble bush.—
Hark! hark! is that Uriah hoarse for blood?
Thine if not his. God hears these sullen walls,
That, like some sea-shell, harbour curses old
And iterate them still, when silence serves.
Let me start now. I see where David is,
Defenceless 'mid old men and such as doubt
Whether his cause be theirs; women are there
And children, cattle and slow sumpter mules,
Thy white-faced brothers chattering for fear,
And all encumbrances and nothing sure;
Wearied with walking long, while night draws round,
They wander vaguely, seeing all things dim.
Terrible is our God, terrible to obey;
But disobeyed, Sodom declares his wrath,
Gomorrah howls the tale, Babel repeats:

The deluge and the sword that turns about
This way and that for ever, flaming fierce!
My lord, let me set forth!

HÛSHAI [starting up] Cursèd be thou,
Accursèd be thy sons, thy fields, thy cattle,
Thy houses and all, whatsoever things are thine!
Cursèd be they forever, saith the Lord.

How violent are the wicked, froward wills,
Usurpers on a confidence divine!

Man walks in fear when most he pleases God!

ABSALOM [who has been some time risen, greatly moved] Ahitophel, thou art a fevered man;

Thou hast grown stranger day by day; some fit
Comes on thee, beads thy brow with sweat, or else
An evil spirit plagues thee, sent by God:

And Hushai looks himself, he is in health.

I have been led by thee and prospered still,

But doubt thy genius leaves thee, as Saul's did;

There seem more signs to favour Hushai; yea,

It seems more hopeful to be innocent.

MANY VOICES

Indeed, an oracle!

ABSALOM Wait this one night;

I have ordained a feast;—so let us taste,

Brave captains all and trusted counsellors,

A first-fruit of our enterprise. Draw forth,

Marshal to carnage on a narrow field,

Devour whole bullocks crying 'Joab's prime,'

And smack your lips o'er well hashed Gibborim;

Piled squares of honey-comb like conquered cities

Shall bleed their gold to sweeten lordly ease,

Baskets of peaches humbly blushing wait

Like captive maidens our nonchalant palates.

I'll join you at the table, but would first

Make some assay, above, to charm an hour

And prime my fortunes 'gainst the time to come

With promise sure.—Ahitophel, I take
Thy first advice and will go up;—give place.

SEVERAL VOICES [solemnly]

God save the king and multiply his seed!

AHITOPHEL [letting ABSALOM pass, catches
his sleeve while making a reverence and whispers im-
ploringly]

My Lord!

ABSALOM [laughing]

No more—I'm bound for Eden-bower.

No serpents, good Ahitophel; peace, peace!

Thou to-morrow shalt defeat old Hushai, yea,

On every point; I swear it by my crown.

[He passes out to the right: almost immediately after
LEMUEL returns and leads out MERAB.]

REBECCA [who has been sitting sobbing and closely
veiled looks up after him and cries, but too late to be
heard] Ah, wilt thou leave me then to die alone!

[seeing AHITOPHEL, who has remained standing
where he was, she continues, rising to come to him, in
entreating tones]

O sir, thou seem'st not very busy now,

I pray thee, are there cures for poisoned wounds?

Of thy great wisdom help me, while there's time!

We are so rich we could afford a charm:

It is a little one, a pin's prick, sir!

AHITOPHEL [dreamily descending the stairs]

A pin's prick, an hair's turning of the scale,

An old man's foolishness, a young man's hopes,

A little too much blood in certain veins

Inclines the brain to fever: all is lost!

REBECCA Oh say not so, good sir, but look at it;
First see, how very small it is, dear lord.

[She bares her shoulder, coming quite close for him to
see, while the CONCUBINES titter and the noise
dies away from the council hall.]

AHITOPHIEL. [looking at and laying his finger on the spot] Here is no sign of poison, child; no change of tint, no sullen look; this is sound flesh: There is no evil near thee. Go to bed!

REBECCA

God bless thee, sir; I kiss thy garment's hem.
'Tis like enough that naughty woman lied,
For these are laughing now as though they knew.
I thank thine excellent wisdom, my dear lord.
[She goes back and sits in the same place, covering herself with her shawl as before.]

AHITOPHIEL. [coming forward]

'Mine excellent wisdom!' O thou dreadful God,
In such a child thou hidest thy rebuke.
I, serving thee, did think to serve myself:
Shouldst thou reward a man? Thou metest grace
At pleasure, lendest wisdom for so long.
Should wise men crave a pyramid of stones,
Since such might seem to plead with memory
Not only, but with thee? 'This man was wise,'
Such stones might seem to say; 'But no man is,'
'Thy countless stars reply in their calm glee
Scorning those numbered stones. I had forgot,
That to God only do belong wisdom
And strength and length of days.
[He pauses and bows his head.]

'Tis best that I go home,
Who am but a dead dog.
[He goes up and out through the council chamber,
while the CURTAIN is slowly lowered.]

ACT III. SCENE II.

An open glade in the wood of Ephraim. Time, morning. In front grass, then broken ground, stones, and boulders hiding the mouth of a pit; beyond the vista of the glade, where as the day proceeds skirmishers cross

and recross. Enter in front AHIMAAZ and JONATHAN meeting; both cry 'Brother, good day,' and embrace.

JONATHAN

Let us keep well together through the day.

AHIMAAZ

'T will scarce be cool as in the well last night.

She was the better sort, whose baffling chat

Put blinkers on lord Absalom's keen spies.

They never dreamed that we could hear them curse,

Or thought to shift her cloth, disturb her grain,

Or trouble her to stop her busy mill.

JONATHAN

I would not live through that same hour again;

By Noah's ark, it was an aching time!

AHIMAAZ

My limbs are yet a little stiff.—Paid pains!

I never saw the king so pleased with me.

The nimbler I with hope, this day may tide

Some greater chance for me to bear good news;

I'll sleep in wells, or nest in lofty trees,

Or run like a mad dog without a turn,

To bring such safely to great David's ear.

JONATHAN

And so will I and more too.

AHIMAAZ

How more too?

JONATHAN

Am I not stronger, swifter, elder born?

Then by so much the more.

AHIMAAZ [laughing gaily]

So I'sau was,

Yet Jacob won the blessing of the Lord,

A weaker, younger man.—Yonder their tents!

They keep but an ill watch; the prince, see, leaves

The vast pavilion pitched beneath those oaks.

Come, let's make haste; his trumpet speaks to battle.

To Joab I, and to Abishai

Speed thou this tidings; but fight we side by side!
[Exeunt severally. Enter ABSALOM riding a mule,
followed on foot by LEMUEL.]

ABSALOM

This absence of Ahitophel's is cross;
Old Hushai shows but foolish in the field;
We have been talking, but what is there done?
At random have we pitched upon this wood,
Thus to fight parcelled, scared by screened alarms,
Mistaking hostile trumpets for our own.
Mere chances arm against us; Droob, found dead—
My grand Egyptian bay, whom I more loved
Than men love children, fed him choicer—'tis
A sign; Ahitophel would cry 'A sign!'
Perchance he poisoned him, and meant a sign,
Which may not then come true.—Lemuel!

LEMUEL My lord!

ABSALOM Glance back: is Hushai there?

LEMUEL He is,

My lord.

ABSALOM What, still?

LEMUEL He arms him very slow.

ABSALOM

He does not mean hot work, but arms for flight—
For fear a child should hit him with a stone
Before he reach Jerusalem alive.

He props me with advice and nothing more;
Ahitophel had been all mettle now,—
What's come to him? Confound this Hushai! fool!
He is too old; I wish he were with David;
'Tis David, David, David rammeth home
His every word.

[Enter a MESSENGER.]

Fellow, what news?

MESSENGER My lord,

To Giloh came Ahitophel last night,

There, put his house in order, hanged himself,
And died so.

ABSALOM Baäl! this mule's a stubborn brute.
[dismounting]

Here, Lemuël, hold him—I will fight on foot.
Their trumpets answer ours, I must be quick.
[to the messenger]

Art thou not gone yet, villain, greedy cur,
Thou beast, thou blinking spaniel, fawning dog!
[drives him off, striking him with the scabbard]

Lemuël, I know this wood; this glade is its
Most likely spot. I'll always rally hither.
Amasa must be captain (Ahitophel's not coming);
I'll go to him at once; we must lay on.
So stop thou here, or just within the covert.

How hot it grows!

[He turns round.] What, art thou not gone yet?

One minute to one's self! [stamps]

[LEMUEL leads off the mule.]

ABSALOM [after a moment] Am I alone?

[then louder] Ahitophel, Ahitophel, come back.

LEMUEL Didst thou call, my lord?

ABSALOM No, the wood

Seems often full of words, but mark them not;

I have been here a thousand times alone,

And heard most strange confabulations held

As though the trees did talk.

[speaking lower when he is again alone] Ahitophel,

I never loved thee much. Oh, not enough:

Thy mind was strung too tense to tune with mine.

I needed thee, I need thee; broken faith

Preaches like Nathan to me: I am judged.

God did ask blood; my father's, brother's, mine?

I know not which. O feeble, feeble Hushai!

A king? and do kings quake so in themselves?

Has God's alliance e'er been strictly kept?

Saul was lost, David has been threatened, I
 Must needs be punished worse. The law is plain,
 'Thou shalt not strike thy father, no, nor kill.'
 When I was young and, thwarted, beat the air,
 Crying 'Bad father mine, O wicked David,'
 Nathan would oft say this, or some such thing,
 Was in our nation's covenant with God.
 Yet I am young;
 A covenant?
 Ah, is there none with youth—with beauty none?
 Did God not promise largely, making me
 So fair, so amply dowered?
 And would he have fulfilled?
 How could he bless us all? O forty brothers!
 There are too many creatures breathe the air;
 Too many claims; too many precedents!
 The presence of the world o'erawes my soul.
 To think but how the nations do lie deep,
 Even unto the earth's remotest end!
 Who knows, how far beyond the utmost isle,
 What hearts are beating as my heart beats now?
 I have slept fast and dreamed; now do wake up,
 And there the trees stand right and left of me;
 The grass, the stones are under foot once more,
 And I am just a man, a prince in Israël,
 Borne up between the horns of great events.
 Destiny fronts me, sullen in approach;
 Ahead the battle threatens parricidal;
 Courage is gone; despair must take the bit
 Between close serried teeth for half a mile,
 When either I shall enter once again,
 The lovely kingdom of my late lost dream
 Or I shall wince the pang of death and cease.
 This blood that thunders to my listening soul
 At halt, like one beside a waterfall,
 Beside its own past rushing on to havoc—

This blood will creep among the daisy roots
And wind about the stones, or feel its way
Down through soft earth, where mice have made them
homes;

Nor shall I, then, desire it otherwise.

No! This it is to dream: and waking was

When I was king: ten minutes more awake,

Ten minutes more to reign, ten minutes more

To ride the shocks of war a visible sign!—

Then, boy, give me my buckler! Lemuël!

[goes out shouting on the right]

[Blare of trumpets: shouts in confusion: skirmishers
dash across the distant glade: presently fugitives, now
singly, now by twos and threes, cross in front.]

LEMUEL [as, wounded, he leads on the mule]

They have not hurt the beast. I got away,

But still I bleed too fast; it is not safe!

A faintness takes me—we must bandage it.

I can't undo this scarf, it clings and knots—

Rebecca, help me to untie . . . it hurts too much!

Oh! Oh!

[swoons, falling with the bridle twisted round his arm.
Fugitives still dart from covert to covert, and skirmish-
ers still occasionally close in the distance.]

ABSALOM [running on]

Oh, here the mule is!—What, Lemuel hurt?

[he attempts to raise LEMUEL, who staring wildly
and propping himself upon his hand, cries]

My lord, my lord, thou art a wicked man!

A mailed cherub passed by here but now,

And asked where thou wast hidden. Oh! [dies.]

ABSALOM [looking up where he is kneeling on one
knee] God of our fathers, great Jehovah, what!

Have I been proud a little? Childishly

Strutted beneath thine awful deep blue noon?

Has David's God no touch of David's kindness—

Got no indulgence? Hast thou none?—not even
 For princely beauty going on before
 Thy sure-foot wisdom—young and hungry beauty
 Left free, but tempted so without respite,
 Till driven by desires disordinate
 It makes a heady rush, sound health unknown,
 Through famine reaches famine, through thirst thirst,
 Meets, goaded thus, inexorable wrath,
 And hopeless hunted runs?
 [rising he attempts to lead off the mule, but the bridle
 being twisted in LEMUEL'S grasp, fails]
 My very mule is tethered fast to death.
 No time to lose, I cannot force these fingers,
 There, there. [he cuts the bridle with his sword]
 My limbs hang back from flight; are they still proud?
 Yet all is lost, indeed! Oh, no, not yet
 Not yet, not yet! Bridleless now, my fate
 Or fortune is this uncontrollable beast.
 Spur him I can, but stop or turn him never:
 Then forwards, forwards, safety! Ha!
 [his foot slips as he mounts]
 O help me; I have sinned . . .
 Once more, I pray: let me not be quite vain,
 But use me to some purpose, most high God;
 Let me not die to-day! help me escape
 And school me in some distant unknown land;
 Like Joseph keep me captive! Let me work
 And win my father's pardon, brothers' love!
 They come, I see fierce Joab. Let me work!
 Help me escape! O grant me yet one day!
 One chance! One, one, one draught of hope!
 [having led the mule to the side he mounts and rides
 off on the right.]
 JOAB [almost at once entering left]
 That was the prince fled hence? Yes, this is Lemuël,
 The boy he made his armour-bearer,—dead.—

Against me then, nor talked at all of shekels.

JOAB I may not tarry thus with thee. 'To Joab!'
[goes off shouting]

Let all his friends draw in to Joab now!

SOLDIER

I fear thou wilt displease thy master, Joab;

And, though the young man doth deserve to die,

I would not meddle with God's vengeance

Knowing the king's mind stood averse to it. [Exit.]

[After a time JOAB'S armour-bearers bear in the body of ABSALOM and cast it into the pit; then, as a great crowd gradually assembles, they throw in stones, filling the pit and raising a sort of rude pyramid above, while now one and then another says] May all die thus,

Who raise their hands against the Lord's anointed!

[or] Let this be for a sign! Shall not men say

'How terrible is God!' on seeing this

In times to come?

[or again] Let this make peace in Israël.

[or else] So establish thou our kings, O Lord of Hosts,

Even as these stones that no man shall cast down.

[and some mocking]

Ha, Absalom, a jewel for thy crown!

[or] A soft sleek concubine come to thy bed—

Will lie with thee for ever close as death.

[again] Now thou art like to Samson in thy death!

Save that the Philistines scarce weep so much.

[or] A child is born to thee, a heavy child.

[and yet again]

As the fair stars for number, this thy seed

Shall bear thy name long as stones tell old tales.

[JOAB, who enters with ABSALOM'S cloak and chain and scarf, stands looking on, when AHIMAAZ runs up] Let me bear tidings to the king, my lord,

How that the Lord upon his enemies

Hath thoroughly avenged him. Let me run.

JOAB

Thou shalt not bear the tidings to the king

This day, my son! for, lo, his son is dead.

[turning to one of his armour-bearers]

Cushi, go tell the king what thou hast seen.

[CUSHI bows and runs off.]

AHIMAAZ

But, howsoever, let me run, I pray thee;

I yet can overtake this Cushi.

JOAB

Nay!

Nay, wherefore wilt thou run, my son? since thou

Hast got no tidings; thou hast not been here!

AHIMAAZ

But let me run.

JOAB

Run.

[AHIMAAZ runs after CUSHI, and shortly JONATHAN enters breathing hard.] Was that not

Ahimaaz that sped away so fast?

JOAB

Ay, with tidings unto David is he sped.

JONATHAN [leaving JOAB and coming forward]

Oh, I am hardly used and short of breath,

Or I might overtake him even yet!

This is a victory, yet have I won naught,

No spoil, no fame, no prize for bearing news.

O God, would thou hadst kept thy gifts for others

And given me this, to win myself somewhat,

Instead of strength and comely looks and speed;

Then weaker, younger men might joy in these.

What should I care, a minion of thy choice?

[The CURTAIN drops.]

ACT III. SCENE III.

Without the gate at Mahanaim. Time, noon. The gate is flanked by two towers, and over it is a chamber, with a wooden cage for archers hanging outside, a casement in which is open. Between the inner and outer gates is a

seat set up on a carpet for DAVID, and giving on this tunnel are two small doors leading, by the towers, to the room above.

DAVID [who is discovered pacing to and fro in the full sunshine before the gate]

'Tis in the wind! I'm sure 'tis in the wind!

This summer air, for all its gentle seeming,

Doth sting me like the velvet leaves of nettles,

Charged with distemper, and I long to be

Immersed in carnage: even so old a man

'Thirsteth for blood. Ah! whose would most refresh?

Would that this hand might slay Ahitophel,

Who I perceive has been the cancr'ous cause:

Dearly 't would pleasure me to watch him bleed.—

Hush, infanticidal rage! All fury sent

Forth to their edging on who warm in slaughter,

Imperils thee, my son, mine Absalom,

My stolen boy.—Ahitophel, thou thief,

Perish in thine iniquity! Not gold,

Not power, not fame incited thee, but love;

Or rather love, unsafely yoked with these,

Was snatched with them and sullied in thy hands,

Too coarse to value such a prize. Vile thief,

Called often friend, now, fiend for evermore!—

I rage again: and so I say again,

'Tis in the wind, a seed of Adam's sin,

Invisible dust that enters by the eye

Which lusteth, by the ear which envies—cools

The moist warm palm, which covets—plays with skirts,

And finds the body out in all its weakness.

Ah, would that they had let me go to war!

'T would lay this fever. But thou, bloody man,

Dost totter on the border of thy grave

And lust for blood! O David, forfeit soul,

Doth danger tempt thee yet?—I serve thee, God;

Desert not me! Thine, thine shall be the praise.—

'Tis foolishness to walk thus in the sun,
And heats the brain.

[he goes and sits down]

WATCHMAN [from top of the left tower]
There comes a man.

DAVID There is

If he do come alone,
Some tidings in his mouth?

[He comes forward and looks up.]

WATCHMAN

My lord, he is alone.

DAVID I should sit down.

[He sits again: a silence]

WATCHMAN [leaning over and seeing the porter,
who has come out by the small door in the left tower]

Behold, another man that runs alone.

PORTER

My lord, another man there runs alone.

DAVID [coming out again] He also bringeth tidings:

WATCHMAN

The running of the foremost man doth seem

Much like to that of young Ahimaáz,

The son of Zadok.

DAVID Good—a good man, he brings
Good tidings.

[AHIMAAZ from without:

All is well!]

[entering and falling on his face before David]

The Lord, thy God,

Be blessèd, for he hath delivered up

The men that lifted up their hands, my lord,

Against my lord!

DAVID

Is the young man, even Absalom, safe?

AHIMAAZ

O king,

When me, thy servant, thy servant Joab sent,

I saw a tumult, but knew not indeed
What it might mean; though all men marvelled; for
The wood devoured more people than the sword.
I stumbled, coming, over those stunned dead,
Run blind 'gainst rugged trunks or tripped in brakes,
And fallen with a strange fatality,—
The signal sign that God fought on our side.

DAVID

Turn thou aside; stand here.

CUSHI [running on] Tidings, my lord!
For thee the God of Israel hath avenged;
This day have fallen all who rose against thee.

DAVID

Is the young man, even Absalom, safe?

CUSHI O King,
The enemies of my lord the king, and all
That rise against thee to thy hurt, be as
That young man is!

DAVID Be thou accursed ever!

'T were better to have died than breathe such words.

[rises, rends his garments, and proceeds through the
small door in the right tower; wherein, mounting past
the slit windows of the spiral stair, he is heard to ex-
claim] O my son Absalom, my son, my son!

O Absalom, my son, my son! Would God
That I had died for thee, my son, my son!

O my son Absalom!

[at last, having gained the chamber above, he is seen
kneeling up in the cage; and, while parties of soldiers
arrive and enter the town with downcast looks, he is
heard, weeping bitterly, at intervals to wail forth]

How beautiful was Absalom, my son!

More lovely than his mother in her youth

Was Absalom, and stately as a tree.

Who will bring strength back to an aged man?

Ah, like my youth returned was Absalom!

[JOAB entering from the left meets SOLOMON coming through the gate, under which they stop.]

SOLOMON

My brother's death is sore upon my father. Hark!

DAVID Had any other man so fair a son,
What king of old, what far-off king? None! none!

SOLOMON

Alas, I fear he will refuse all comfort.

Couldst thou not save my brother then, O Joab?

JOAB

Hark thee, my son, put on these costly spoils!—
This cloak he from his mother, graced Maäcah had:
The King himself put it on her, what time
They wed with pomp; it bears a blush, deep-steeped
In heyday pleasures, prosperous loves and times,
Which yet his withered cheek will flush to meet:
For memory is virgin to the last,
Both quick and bashful.

DAVID There was no fault in all his body found;
His skin was flawless, all his limbs were sound!

JOAB [continuing, having paused while the king
cried] This chain was Tamar's; is it not such the king
Hangs round his virgin daughters' necks, when first
They broach their blushing teens?

SOLOMON Yea, even such:
This is one of those chains.

JOAB This Tamar gave him,
No doubt grown hopeless of a husband.

DAVID He did not look like others; coming, he
Shed from sheer beauty sheer felicity:
Yet he is dead. Oh, Absalom is dead;
His hair heaped dabbled on a bloody bed!

JOAB [having finished arraying SOLOMON in AB-
SALOM'S ornaments]

Now will I up, reproach—rebuke him; then,
When these first tears dry hard round his hot eyes,

Come thou between me and his growing wrath
And dim his vision with less scalding brine,
Till, soothed, he comes to see like other men.

DAVID [while JOAB slowly ascends]

My son, my son, is gone, has ceased to be,
Who long ago learned speaking on my knee.

Oh! Absalom is dead, my son so fair,
He hath no friends, no converse, walks no where.

[and still, though JOAB stands beside him]

Darkness has stooped o'er thee, fallen and lost;
Yea, lost and fallen, lovely as thou wast.

O Lord, my God, with Absalom, my son,
Since thou hast done, thou shouldst with me have done!

JOAB [laying his hand on DAVID'S shoulder]

How hast thou shamed the faces of thy servants,
Who held thee worth ten thousand of ourselves!

This day thy servants, who have saved thy life,
The lives of thy sons, the lives of thy daughters, yea

The lives of thy wives, and of thy concubines,—

Thou hast shamed them all, thy servants; this day thou
hast shamed them;

For thou lovest thine enemies better than thy friends.

For this day, I perceive indeed, had all we died,

If Absalom had lived, though all we died,

It would have pleased thee well. Now, therefore, rise,
Go forth, speak comfortably to thy friends!

DAVID

Come not too near me, Joab, I am sore:

The wounded lion's more dread than one unhurt.

JOAB

Now, by the Lord, I swear, if thou wilt not

There shall not tarry with thee one this night:

A far worse evil will that be to thee

Than all evils else that have befallen thee

From thy youth upward even until now.

[DAVID rises, and they descend in silence, and SOL-

OMON meets his father as he issues from the tower.]

DAVID [embracing SOLOMON]

O my son Absalom, O Absalom!

Yea, Solomon, thou must be now to me

Thyself and Absalom

Yet, yet his beauty! that makes rich a grave

Yonder among the trees; in a strange place

Mine eyes have never seen, shall never see,

His beauty lies. My son, my son! he had

Such splendid hair! [again embracing SOLOMON]

God keep thee, my dear son.

[The CURTAIN falls.]

